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THE CONSOLER;

OR,

PIOUS READINGS ADDRESSED TO THE SICK
AND TO ALL WHO ARE AFFLICTED.

BY

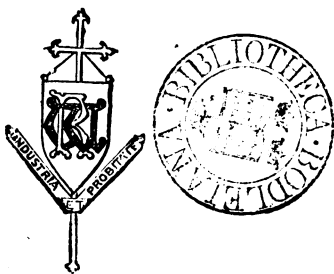
THE REV. FATHER LAMBILOTTE, S.J.,

WHO DIED IN THE ODOUR OF SANCTITY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH, BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND ABBOT BURDER,

O. CIST.



LONDON :

R. WASHBOURNE, 18, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1873.

138. i. 192.

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" Quem diligit Dominus castigat.

" Whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth."

HEB. xii. 6.

APPROBATION.

WE, John Mary Mioland, by the Divine mercy and the favour of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Amiens,

Having submitted to examination the little work entitled "The Consoler," we have deemed it most worthy of the enlightened piety of the author, and excellently adapted to inspire with Christian sentiments those who are afflicted. We therefore approve of its publication, and we recommend it to the Pastors and to the Faithful of our Diocese.

Given at Amiens, this 25th of July, 1841.

✠ JOHN, Bishop of Amiens.

Imprimi potest.

Tournai, 19th March, 1844.

J. J. DUPIEREUX, V. General.

TO SAINT JOSEPH.

It is to you, O great Saint, that I offer and consecrate this little book. I lay it at your feet, as a work which belongs to you ; it is wholly yours, since it comes from you. You inspired me with the thought of writing it, you have obtained for me from God sufficient strength to undertake, and sufficient perseverance to finish it.

Be pleased, then, O my beloved Patron, graciously to accept this book as the offering of my sincere homage. It is a very poor tribute of my love and gratitude ; but if you vouchsafe to bless it—if you deign to fill its pages with that spirit of grace and unction, the fulness of which you received when with Jesus and Mary—it will bring forth in souls fruits of salvation most pleasing to God.

Be then, O glorious Patriarch, the protector of this little volume; obtain for all the sick and afflicted who shall read it, those illuminating graces which will discover to them the inestimable value of their sufferings. Enkindle in their hearts that burning love with which the martyrs were inflamed, that, like them, they may become holy victims immolated to the glory of God.

PREFACE OF THE TRANSLATOR.

SOME years ago my attention was drawn to the valuable work, of which an English translation is now offered to the public. After repeated perusals of "Le Consolateur," it occurred to me forcibly that a book of such practical worth, translated into English, might be of use, not only to sick and afflicted Catholics among ourselves, but also, by God's blessing, to pious Protestants. Father Lambilotte explains and exemplifies, in "The Consoler," the true doctrine of the Cross ; in other words, the true way of salvation. He teaches us how we may carry the Cross with patience and love ; and out of the Holy Scriptures, and the writings of the Holy Fathers, he wonderfully consoles us in all our afflictions and trials, whether of body or mind. One cannot but hope that the thoughtful perusal of this little work, though not one of controversy, may lead many pious Protestants to submit to the Holy Church, the sole pillar, and only ground of the truth, as it is in Jesus.

Books written expressly to console the sick and the afflicted are rare even in Catholic France. It would seem, as our author remarks in his preface, speaking of France, "as if this class of society were the only one which is almost shut out from the thoughts and solicitude even of pious writers." How much more is this necessarily the case with regard to England? Surely, then, one may hope, that with the blessing of God, "The Consoler" may be of service to many souls in England. On all sides we are translating French books of instruction and piety, to meet the increasing wants of our converts, and of inquiring Protestants nearing the Holy City.

This little work of Fr. Lambilotte comes to us with high recommendations.

1. The approbation of the Bishop of Amiens, subsequently Archbishop of Toulouse, who speaks of it, as most worthy of the enlightened piety of the author, and recommends it to all the Priests and the Faithful of his Diocese.

2. The personal character of the author, who died in the odour of sanctity. The ardent love of our Divine Saviour, which he manifests throughout the work, his constant citations of the Holy Scriptures, and his tender piety, will recommend it to all pious Protestants. The book, too, was

written during a protracted illness, and in the midst of much suffering. The pious and learned author consoles others in their trials, with the consolations which he received himself from God in his own afflictions. The true Comforter is the Holy Ghost, Who gives strength courageously to endure, and even the desire voluntarily to embrace, all manner of sufferings; light to estimate their immense value in the spiritual life; and also the consolations we need to support them with patience and with love; in other words, it is the Holy Ghost Who makes the Cross our salvation, our light, our resurrection, our great comfort, and all our glory. If this truth were well understood by the afflicted (and are we not all more or less afflicted?) how would the face of the earth be renewed? The hospital would become, in fact, a religious house; the sick bed, paradise; and the words of the prophet would be realized spiritually: "Waters would break out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness; in the dens where dragons dwelt before, would rise up the verdure of the reed and the bulrush." There would be joy and gladness, where there is now affliction without faith, sorrow without hope, and mourning without consolation.

3. It is another and great recommendation of this book, that Fr. Lambilotte dedicates it to the

glorious St. Joseph, and puts it in a particular manner under his protection. At the close of the book, in his touching prayer to St. Joseph, he thus addresses him :—" Holy St. Joseph ! glorious spouse of the Mother of God, powerful protector of the agonizing, and the special patron of a good death, it was with your name I began this work, it is with your name I desire to finish it. I offer it to you anew, and I beseech you to impress upon it the seal of your love ; give it your blessing, that it may become a tree of life in the field of the Church, and bring forth the fruits of grace and salvation. May it be circulated in every province and city ; may it be found in all the hospitals, may its voice be heard by all the sick, and may it console all the afflicted. Take it then, O holy St. Joseph, under your protection, pour upon it a blessing which may every day become more and more fruitful ; that so this little work may make all the afflicted, Saints, and bring them to eternal happiness !"

Lastly, this instructive and beautiful work has in the original passed through nine editions.

The following translation is made from the edition published at Tournai, in 1861.

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,

6, Camden Terrace, Turnham Green, W., 1873.

P R E F A C E.

AMONG the prodigious number of works published from day to day, there are very few which are addressed to the sick and the afflicted. It would seem as if this class of the community is shut out, if I may venture to say so, from the thought and the solicitude of nearly all our writers. While we have treatises composed for the various periods of human life, for all classes of society, and for both sexes,—while the people, and their sovereigns, have books which instruct them in their respective duties; while officers of state, and the higher ranks of society, the uneducated, too, as well as the learned, have at hand works which treat of the duties of that class to which each belongs, according to its rank and character ;—the sick in our hospitals, and

in our families, and that large number of the unfortunate, everywhere to be found ;—the class, I say, of the sick, and afflicted, is the only one almost wholly unprovided with books, adapted to their state of trial and suffering.

It is with the intention of supplying this want, that we publish this work.

We have divided it into six parts.

The first part treats of submission to the Providence of God ; the second, of the happiness of afflictions ; the third, of patience in afflictions, whether of the body or the mind ; the fourth, of confidence in God in afflictions ; the fifth, of the peace of the soul in afflictions ; the sixth, of the love of God in afflictions.

Each of these parts is subdivided into four or five sections of greater or lesser length, according to the subject matter.

Thus, persons of piety, the pastors of parishes, whether in the town or in the country, will have it in their power to distribute this book to the sick in the hospitals, and to all whom they may visit.

This little work, then, will fulfil their pious intentions, and enable them at once to satisfy their

zeal for the glory of God, and for the salvation of their brethren. They will put it into the hands of the afflicted, as a spiritual alms, the merit of which will be infinitely greater in the eyes of God, than that of a "cup of cold water," given to those who thirst. For, if this small boon which is of service only to the body, has been deemed worthy of recompense, of how much greater value and merit will be a spiritual alms, which brings consolation to those who are in affliction, inclines them to virtue, and may become perhaps the commencement, in their souls, of an exalted sanctity. How many indeed of the Saints, might we mention, whose perfection had no other beginning, than the reading of a pious book on a bed of suffering! We know that the great instrument, of which God makes use, to form His elect, is the crucible of tribulation; and we may be assured that when once those who suffer, come to know the precious treasure hidden in their affliction, there is no longer any obstacle which can arrest their progress towards heaven; as an eagle they will wing their ceaseless flight onward, from virtue to virtue, and become consumed in the fires of Divine love.

O, all you faithful souls, who desire to do good,—

you zealous pastors, who seek only the glory of God, and the salvation of souls,—here is a good work, worthy of your zeal and charity ; endeavour to circulate this little book ; make it known and liked by all the sick ; open for them this fountain of living water, whence they may draw forth those graces of patience, of consolation, and of joy, which will make them cease to feel their sorrow, and which will raise them above nature, by the consideration derived from the exercise of faith and love. They will thus learn the value of their afflictions, and they will one day be indebted to you for the fruits of salvation, which they will have gathered from this little volume.

Oh ! what a change would be produced in souls, if pains were taken to make known these pious readings ! What a change would there be in our hospitals ! Instead of those impious complaints, those Satanic blasphemies, which we often hear vomited against religion, against Providence, and even against the Sisters of Charity, who are devoted to the service of the sick, there would be heard the canticles of benediction and of thanksgiving, rising up continually to Heaven, from the bed of the sufferers ; for they would then know how to suffer

with resignation ; and instead of regarding their calamities and their sufferings as the effects of God's wrath, they would henceforth recognize them as the most certain proof of His love, and the infallible mark of their predestination.

Yes, such is the earnest wish we have not ceased to cherish since we began this work, and this is the only motive which has induced us to undertake it.

As to the way in which we have treated our subject, we do not pretend to say any thing new, or any thing which has not been thought of and said before. After having consulted the best ascetic works, during a long illness, which has given us an opportunity both of reading and meditating on their contents, we have no hesitation in borrowing from those excellent treatises, both their thoughts and sentiments, and whatever we considered in them most fit to make a salutary impression upon our readers, and to satisfy their piety. But the inviolable law we have prescribed for ourselves, and which we have constantly observed, has been, to let nothing fall from our pen, which we have not ourselves experienced, and approved, so to speak, in our own heart. We therefore offer this work to the public, with so much the greater confidence, as

it is not the labour of a professed writer, but the fruit of a protracted sickness; and thus it will make its appearance from the very date of its publication—clothed, if I may so express it, with the sanction of experience;—and this, to all judicious readers, will doubtless be a recommendation in its favour. /

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THE CONSOLER.

PART THE FIRST.

ON SUBMISSION TO THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD
IN THE AFFLICTIONS OF THIS LIFE.

I.

AFFLICTIONS COME FROM GOD.]

1. Do you wish to find consolation in all your trials? Do you wish to be always content in the midst of the most severe sufferings? Do you wish to enjoy peace and a settled joy, even when your sufferings are at their height? I do not ask you to consider a God dying upon the cross to rescue you from eternal torments. I do not ask you to look down into the depths of that hell, which you have perhaps deserved many times, by your sins ;—only reflect on this indisputable truth, that nothing can happen throughout the entire universe, with the exception of sin, without the

action and the will of God, Whose designs are always infinitely wise, and always tend to our greater good. Consequently, all the afflictions of this life, of whatever kind they may be, and from whatever quarter they may come, are sent to us by a merciful Providence, Who wishes only the well-being of His creatures. On this truth, as on a solid foundation, we ought to ground our confidence, our peace and our happiness. Do not think that it is necessary to be a Christian, in order to admit this truth; even pagans themselves have acknowledged it.

Let us hear Epictetus, one of the greatest philosophers of antiquity. "It is an admirable expedient," he says, "which the wise have found to console themselves in their misfortunes, and never to feel any bitterness in the midst of their afflictions, to regard them all as coming from the hand of God, and to receive them with this conviction, that it is He who has chosen them for us, and apportioned them to us, according as He has deemed it best for our greater good. Never say then, my dear friend, that you have lost anything,—say only that you have given back to God what you held of Him as a loan and as a deposit. Your son, you say, has departed this life; it is God who has taken him, as what belonged to Him. God lent him to you; he was a loan, not a gift. Is it not reasonable then, that you should return him to his Master, when the term of the loan has

expired? You have lost your health; did you not know that your health was God's property, that it was a loan, not a gift? Why should you be vexed, if you have to give back to Him what He has only lent you? But you say that it is an unjust and wicked man, who has deprived me of this property. But what does it matter by whose hand God recovers what was His own? Is He not free to make use of whom He likes, to be the depository of His treasures? So long as He allows you the enjoyment of the property, keep it—I grant you this; but remember that it is not yours, but His. We are in this world in the midst of creatures, as strangers at an inn; we must quit it, when the Master wishes us to do so." (Epict. *Enchirid.* C. 14.)

2. These are very beautiful sentiments in a pagan; we must acknowledge that by the mere light of reason, he had discovered truths, which even with the aid of the principles of faith, we Christians are rarely able to find. Let us then be as wise as this philosopher, and refer all to Divine Providence. God himself makes it a duty for us to do so. "I am the Lord," He says, by the mouth of the prophet Isaias, "and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil." (Is. xlv. 7.) "I will kill, and I will make to live; I will strike and I will heal." (Deut. xxxii. 39.) "Shall there be evil in the city," saith the prophet Amos, "which the Lord hath not done; any affliction, any misery, which does

not come from the Lord?" (Amos iii. 6.) "Yes," saith the wise man, "good and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, come from God." "Who is he," saith Jeremias, "that hath said that anything can happen without the command of the Lord? Do not good and evil go forth from the mouth of the Most High?" And did not our Saviour, the Holy of Holies, who came to instruct us both by His word and His example, say to St. Peter—who through an indiscreet zeal, wished to dissuade Him from the design He had to suffer, and to hinder the soldiers from laying hands upon Him—did not our Saviour say, "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Thus He attributed the outrages and the pains of His Passion, not to the Jews His accusers, not to Judas who betrayed Him, not to Pilate who condemned Him, not to His executioners, although they were the immediate cause of His sufferings and the agents who inflicted them, but to God only; and moreover, He regarded Him not in the light of a Judge but of a Father. "The chalice which My *Father* hath given Me—shall I not drink it?" Shall we not then, after the example of our Divine Saviour, attribute our afflictions, our humiliations, our pains, our sicknesses, to our God, to our Heavenly Father, as their true source?

3. But, you will say perhaps, I should easily believe that God is the Author of my sickness, if from the commencement it had not been owing to

some fault on my part, or if the doctor had been more skilful in ascertaining its cause, or if the infirmarian or some other person had not aggravated it, by his ill-will, or his imprudence ;—such reasoning is false, and indeed absurd. When you reason in this way, you are like the animal—pardon me the comparison—that rushes in great wrath against the stone that struck it, without considering the hand by which the stone was thrown.

It is possible that your sickness has been caused by your own fault, that it is the result of your excesses and your irregular life—but this very fact is a reason why you should bear your sufferings with patience, since you have brought your sickness on yourself—you should then say with the good thief, who exclaimed, “ We suffer indeed justly”—and with the Royal Prophet, “ Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgment is right.”

But, besides this, though your sickness may have been brought on by your own fault, nevertheless you ought to refer it to God as its source. . . . God is not, nor can He be, the Author of your sin—to suppose this, would be blasphemy ; but God is the Author of all the evil which is the consequence of your sin. He did not inspire you with the evil inclination to injure yourself, but He has given you the power to do so ; it is God (together with you, and by means of you) Who did all those physical actions, which brought on your sickness ; it is God Who worked all those changes in the humours of

your body, which ruined your health ; He is Himself in person, in your affliction, by His presence, and His essence. This is a truth so certain that reason itself proves it, even if Faith did not oblige us to believe it. Yes, it is God Who is by His essence, in all our sicknesses—in the fever—in the head-ache—in the gout—it is He who, in conjunction with the second cause, is the Author of all the pains we endure ; it is He who gives those fits, those darting pains—who causes those colics, that aversion for food, and whatever sufferings we have—for if God was not in them, we should feel no pain at all. And do not think that it is cruel of God to treat you in this manner. Is the surgeon cruel when he makes the patient suffer, in order to cure him, and to rescue him from death ? Is the father cruel when he corrects his son, in order to make him good ? No, no—God is a good Father, a physician full of charity ;—He makes you suffer only because He loves you, and because He wishes to make you happy.

Do not say then that it is your sin which is the cause of your sickness, or the doctor, or the infirmarian ; or that it is an enemy, or one who envies you, or a wicked person, that has brought upon you this misfortune, this humiliation—I reply, with St. Augustine, that the Providence of God is the sole Author of your affliction, and that if you attribute it to any other cause, it is a phantom you put in the place of God.

Oh ! how consoling is this thought ! It is a God full of kindness who sends me this sickness ! It is my Saviour—it is my Father—who sends me this pain, in order to purify my soul, and make me pleasing in His eyes. Oh ! what a means of being always content—what peace flows into the soul, when, in every trial that befalls us, we see the goodness of Divine Providence ! The following admirable example will demonstrate this truth, in the clearest manner.

A priest, an eminent theologian, and a preacher of great reputation for sanctity, had asked of God, for many years, the grace to find an able director, who should teach him the shortest way to arrive at perfection ;—one day, while praying in the church, he heard a voice which said : “ Go out of the church, and you will find the director you seek.”

Full of joy and hope, he rises immediately, goes out of the church, and meeting at the door a poor man covered with ulcers, and loathsome sores, he wishes him a good day, according to custom. The poor man replied : “ Father, I have never had any bad days.” The theologian was at first surprised at such a reply, and fearing that the poor man had not heard his salutation, he added : “ My friend, I pray God to bestow upon you abundantly all good things.” “ I do not remember,” replied the poor beggar, “ ever to have received from His hands any evil things.” This reply put our theologian into

still greater difficulty. He thought, however, that one or other of the two had made some mistake. Therefore he repeated the same good wish, but in somewhat different terms. "I repeat once more, my poor man, what I said to you just now, that I pray Almighty God to make you happy." "And I," answered the poor beggar, "beg to reply to you once more, Reverend Father, that I never remember to have been unhappy." The learned doctor, almost in anger, then said to him: "I think, my child, that the greatness of your sufferings has affected your mind;—have I not expressed myself with sufficient clearness? In one word, I tell you that I beseech Almighty God to give you everything that you would desire to have." "Father," replied the poor beggar covered with ulcers, "I beg you not to make yourself uneasy on my account. I am quite satisfied, and I can assure you that I have not only all I could wish for, but nothing in the world happens to me but according to my wish." The theologian began then to recollect himself a little, quite surprised and confused at so strange a way of replying to his good wishes; then resuming the conversation, he pressed the poor man to explain to him the meaning of his replies, acknowledging that he could not conceive how, being reduced to such extreme misery, he should yet think himself the only man in the world who had no miseries to complain of, the only one who was not miserable. The poor man was not slow to grant his pressing entreaty, and,

instructed as he had been in the school of the Holy Spirit, he gave the learned doctor a sublime lesson in these words: "Let me assure you, Father, that it is quite true, that I have never had any bad or evil or unhappy days, as I have just told you ; nor let this at all surprise you, because I am so thoroughly convinced that everything that happens to us, in this world, whether good or evil, comes from a God infinitely good—that I never give myself anxiety about anything ; and with this thought I am so united to God my sovereign Lord, that I am, so to speak, but one-with Him. The sentiments of God, are my sentiments, His thoughts, are my thoughts—His desires are my desires—whatever pleases Him, pleases me—because I wish everything that He wishes, and I do not wish anything that He does not wish. If I am pressed with hunger, I praise God, who wishes it to be so ; if I am inconvenienced by the cold or the heat, if I am annoyed by the rain or by the wind, or tried by sickness, I am content, because it is God who ordains it so ; if people mock at me, if they persecute me, if the devil himself does not spare me, I always have recourse to patience ; I rejoice that the will of God is accomplished in me ; for I know well that neither man nor any other of God's creatures can have any power over me, except as it is given them by God ; this is why I never attribute to creatures whatever harm they may do me, but to

God ; and can God do anything which is not perfectly well done ? Worm of the earth as I am, is it for me to put myself in opposition to the conduct of this great God, or to blame Him in the execution of His designs ? Not feeling any one's hand touching me, but His, why should I complain ? Is he not my Creator, and am I not His creature ? And great God as He is, has He not loved me to such a degree as to die for me upon a cross ? How is it possible, that loving me so tenderly as this, He can wish to do me any harm ? Or that knowing that He is so full of goodness in my regard, how is it possible that I can do otherwise than receive with thanksgiving all that it pleases Him to send me, whether it be health or sickness, honour or dishonour, in a word, whatever His will shall appoint for me ? The evils which come from Him, are no longer evils ; and the good things which come from any other quarter, ought not to be called good. And indeed, as for myself, I reckon among the greatest blessings I have received, that of the power of doing without them. Good and bad fortune, prosperity and adversity, these expressions I know nothing of ; whatever happens, it is the same to me, because all comes from the hand of God. Is it not then true that I have never had any bad or unhappy days, and that I cannot have any, so long as I persevere in the firm resolution I have made, to wish without ceasing, and without reserve, everything that God wishes ? "These are indeed beau-

tiful words," said the learned doctor, "but after all, if God had resolved to condemn you to hell, would you still be content?" "God condemn me to hell!" exclaimed the poor man,—“to hell! He who is goodness itself! Ah! Father, that is not possible, but even if this should be His will, you see that I have two arms;—the one is a profound humility, by an entire submission to Divine Providence; the other is a loving confidence in God's infinite mercy; with these two arms I should have such a powerful hold of Him, that if I went to hell, I should take Him with me; and I would rather be in hell with my God, than be in Paradise without Him.”

The theologian was charmed and edified to hear these words from the mouth of one who was overwhelmed with such great calamities; in his heart he thanked God for the grace of having met with the master he had so much desired to find; and the resolution he made, was to imitate the poor beggar's example, and to abandon himself, as a little child, to the holy and loving Providence of God. (Toler. Instit.—Blosius, append. c. 1.)

Let us have the same docility as this pious theologian; let us follow the beautiful model of this poor mendicant; let us take, as he did, as from the hand of the Lord, every trial and every trouble—persuaded that God governs us with infinite wisdom and goodness, and that never was there a father or a mother more *sensitive* and compassionate with

regard to their children, than is this God of goodness in all that concerns us.

II.

THE AFFLICTIONS OF THIS LIFE ARE AN EFFECT OF
THE WISDOM AND OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

1. THE paternal care that God takes of us, the tender solicitude with which He governs us, is a thought which may well console us in all our afflictions. I shall endeavour to develop this consideration in the present reading. It is only a result of what I have already remarked, that every calamity which happens to us in this life, comes to us from the hand of God, Who is infinitely good. The saints tell us, that we should consider God as the soul of this universe, Who gives being, life, and movement to everything that exists, and Who is Himself in every part of His creation to preserve it—even in every atom. “The Divine Providence,” saith the Holy Spirit, “reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly.” (Wisdom viii. 1.) The Divine Providence is an indefatigable workman, Who never abandons any being, whether in heaven or on earth—but occupies Himself with it continually, yet without eagerness or hurry.

From the highest height of heaven, even to the lowest depth of the creation, nothing escapes the

eye or the action of the Almighty. Not one sparrow falls into the net without His order—not a single leaf of the tree moves but by the hand of God.

But since the Providence of God is so watchful over creatures devoid of reason, since He is so attentive to all their wants, can we believe that He sleeps when man is concerned—man so dear to Him—and that He leaves in isolation and abandonment those whom He has made in His own image, and whom He regards as His children? “No, no,” saith the Royal Prophet, “He who keepeth Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep.” (Psalm cxx. 4.) That eye of God which is ever open on the ant, will not close on the privileged objects of His love. “He keeps a register,” says a pious author, “of all our bones. He counts all the hairs of our head, and not a single one of them falls from it but He knows where it goes, nor can it fall without His permission. There is not a single pulsation of the heart, not a single sigh, without the concurrence of God, and without His acting simultaneously with ourselves.”

It is You, O Sovereign Master, Who moveth our tongues and the pupils of our eyes, Who causeth our hearts to beat, Who stirreth up our good-will and enlighteneth our minds; and when we are buried in sleep, incapable of thinking of Your protection, we may say, that then You redouble Your care of us. You watch, like a good mother, over our preserva-

tion. You take Your rounds, if I may so express myself, within and without us, to see that all is in peace. Our heart is for You a place of delights; it is the object of Your cherished affection.

2. Is not this the idea God Himself gives us, in the Prophet Isaias, of the tenderness He feels for us, when He says: "Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who are carried by My bowels, are borne up by My womb. Even to your old age I am the same, and to your grey hairs I will carry you. I have made you and I will bear: I will carry and will save." (Is. xlv. 3.) "Can a woman forget her infant," saith the prophet in another place, "so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in My hands: thy walls are always before My eyes." (Is. xlix. 15.) And by the mouth of another prophet, the Lord says: "Surely Ephraim is an honourable son to me, surely he is a tender child; for since I spoke of him, I will still remember him. Therefore are My bowels troubled for him; pitying I will pity him, saith the Lord." (Jeremias xxxi. 20.) What language can be more affectionate, more tender? Might we not say that this great God is a Father Who is quite distracted, and as it were, beside Himself with the love He has for His son—that all His thoughts and affections are always fixed upon him,—and that when He speaks of him, He hardly

knows what He says, to such a degree does love transport and blind Him?

3. How can we then believe that such excessive charity towards mankind would wish to deceive us? How can we imagine that a God so good can wish us any evil, and give us a scorpion, to use the words of Jesus Christ, for an egg—and a stone instead of bread? Who dares to murmur, or to complain, when he sees this infinite wisdom and goodness dispensing with uneven hand the various blessings of this life, knowing that His designs tend only to our greater good? What does it matter if some are more honoured, or possess more wealth, or enjoy better health than others? if one is weighed down by sickness or humiliations, and another lives amidst the pleasures and the riches of this life; is it not one and the same spirit of love and of mercy towards mankind, which causes these different allotments—and which has not, and cannot have, any other object in the distribution of its gifts, than the profit and advantage of all who receive them, be they more, or be they less? It is this consideration which makes a Doctor of the Church remark, that we never receive any other than great gifts from God, and that He is our perpetual Benefactor. If it was a creature who wished to present us with an offering, we should do well, no doubt, to examine what that offering was, and the manner of its bestowal; for, as a philosopher remarks, creatures are but an image of the good things they promise,

and they often hide under a fair outside a horrible poison. But God, on the contrary, is infinitely removed from all such treachery ; He confers on us no gift but with a view of making us better and more perfect. It ought then to be sufficient to keep us in tranquillity, to know that all that happens to us comes from Him and by His appointment ; and we should be extremely careful not to complain of the conduct of a God so good in our regard—when we have every reason, on the contrary, to thank and bless Him.

4. The Holy Scripture gives us on this point a very remarkable example in the person of the High Priest Heli. He had been chosen by God to succeed his father in the High-Priesthood, and to perpetuate this exalted dignity in his family to remote generations. But an act of disobedience which he committed, obliged God to change His design and to ruin Heli's hopes. He was the father of a family, but, unhappily, a father too passionately fond of his children, too blind to their faults, too weak to reprove and correct them ; and this to such a degree, that through fear of displeasing them, he allowed his sons to fall into the greatest disorders, and to abuse holy things with impunity ; and instead of putting an end to their infamous licentiousness and to their sacrilegious profanations, by severe reprimands and by rigorous punishments,—through his weak attachment to their persons, he continued in a slothful indifference to their faults, and closed his eyes to their excesses.

His criminal condescension irritated the Lord extremely. What ! foolish and culpable father, you have honoured your sons more than you have honoured Me ! How ungrateful has been your conduct ! You have had more regard to their debaucheries than to My sacrifices ! since instead of disapproving of their scandalous conduct, by your silence you have approved of it ! I had bestowed on you wealth and honour—ought I to have expected from you so much contempt ? Ought the sentiments of nature to have had more power over you, than the interests of My glory ? And ought the shameful pleasures of your sons, to have gained the mastery over My precepts ? Go, prophet, go and tell this prevaricating High-Priest that he is unworthy of My protection ; go and announce to him that his house, which has hitherto enjoyed so great a reputation among the people, shall be utterly ruined ; that his family, which was to have retained the High-Priesthood even to the latest generations, shall not survive him ; that the name of his race shall be blotted out, and its privileges given to another family ; and that his two sons who were his idols, shall both die on the same day.

What is now to become of Heli, when he learns from the mouth of the Prophet these sorrowful tidings ? Will he abandon himself to despair ? Will he be angry with Heaven ? Will he find fault with God's messenger ?

At least, will he not conjure him, with tears, to

turn away from him the wrath of God? No—he does nothing of the kind. Heli, struck by the hand of God, humbles himself, acknowledges his fault, and penetrated with respect for the decrees of Heaven, he replies: “It is the Lord—let Him do what is good in His sight.” (1 Kings iii. 18.) He is my Master, I am His servant; it is just that I should obey Him: He is my Father, and I am His son. Nothing is more reasonable than that I should conform myself to His will. He is my Creator, and I am His creature; it is needful that I should be in His hands, as clay in the hands of the potter, and that I should take whatever shape and form He may please to give me.

What faith in this reply! What exalted sentiments! Should we have expected so much greatness of soul, after so much weakness? But whence came this magnanimous submission? Ah! it is affliction that has wrought this wondrous change. The arm of God has roused this drowsy heart, and has restored it to life and energy. How true it is, that the designs of God in the misfortunes He sends us, are always infinitely wise, and have no other object in view than our happiness? How can we then, after this, give way to thoughts of discontent, of impatience, of anger, or of despair, when some distressing event befalls us, or we are prostrated by bodily suffering? Let us rather say, with Heli, My God! do with me whatever You please; I am Your creature, and You are my Sa-

viour and my Father ; I know that You have sent me this affliction, only to save me from suffering hereafter. May Your holy Name be blessed ! I abandon myself entirely to your paternal Providence.

5. We place implicit faith in our doctor, because we suppose that he understands his profession, and that his object is to cure us—and we will not venture to confide in God ! Shall we suppose that He does not know how to govern His creatures well, and that He does not wish our happiness ? A doctor, often greatly wanting in knowledge or judgment, orders a remedy which subjects the body to racking torture, or, he directs that our arm or our leg should be cut off, to prevent mortification ; we suffer the cruel operation, we thank him for it, and we reward him liberally, because we consider he would not have ordered the remedy unless it had been necessary, and that every one ought to be trusted in what concerns his own profession. But we are not willing to give the same honour to God. One would say that we distrusted His wisdom, and that we feared He would deceive us, even while He is thinking only of our happiness. Alas ! we complain, we murmur at some passing evil, which is intended to be for us the source of the greatest benefits ! If the Patriarch Joseph, when his brothers cast him into a pit, or when they sold him as a slave, or when he was falsely accused by a shameless woman, and thrown into a dark prison,

—if, I say, this son of Jacob had grieved at these apparent humiliations and trials,—would he not in reality have grieved at his own happiness,—since those humiliations were only so many steps which raised him successively, even to the throne of Egypt?

How confused we shall be when we appear before God, and we see the reasons He had for sending us the crosses, which we now receive so unwillingly! Ah! if we saw what God sees, if the future were open to us as it is to Him; if we saw the evils which would have fallen upon us, if God had not sent us that affliction—instead of complaining, we should not know how to express our gratitude to Him for it. O my God, how good you are, not to mind our blind prayers! What would become of us, if, to punish our want of submission, You resolved to satisfy all our desires! What wanderings there would be from the right path, what falls, what mortal and incurable wounds! Into what depths of misery should we not soon be plunged! Continue, O Lord, to despise our wishes, and make Your Will to reign over our own! We are indeed utterly devoid of reason, if we refuse to submit our Will to Yours, since Your Divine Will arranges every event with so much wisdom and love.

6. Alexander the Great, finding himself attacked with a serious illness, sent immediately for his physician, and ordered him to prepare a prompt

remedy. The physician hastened to make up a medicine which he knew by experience to be efficacious, and quickly brought it to the king. But the moment he was about to take the medicine, the king received a letter, in which he was told that his physician was a traitor, and that he had resolved to poison him.

What did the king do? He had always looked upon his physician as a faithful friend, who had lived with him from his childhood, had rendered him the greatest services, and had rescued him from the most imminent dangers. "What!" said the king, "am I now to suspect his fidelity?" Then full of indignation, he presented the letter to his physician, and with a look of great kindness, said to him, "My dear friend, I will never doubt your love." On saying this, he took the medicine, and drank it off with the greatest confidence.

The application of this incident is easy: what friend has been more faithful to you, or what father could be more tender than your God? What benefits He has bestowed on you! From what evils, from what dangers has not His merciful hand delivered you! Consider heaven—hell—the cross—the three theatres, if I may so speak, where He manifests to your admiring contemplation the tender love He bears you. The cross, on which He died for your salvation; hell, from which He has delivered you; heaven, which He has destined for

you, that you might for ever enjoy its unutterable happiness. Well! this same God, in order to bring you to this eternal beatitude, now presents you a somewhat bitter chalice; will you refuse to drink it?

III.

AFFLICTIONS ARE SENT TO US BY GOD FOR OUR
GREATER GOOD.

1. ST. CLEMENT, Pope, in the writings he has left us on the first century of the Church, tells us that St. Peter was often pleased to mention in conversation, the touching instances of the kindness and charity of Jesus Christ during His life on earth. He used to shed tears of love, when he called to mind the tenderness of this Man-God, who watched over the wants of His Apostles, as a kind mother watches over her children. He often related with particular affection, how our Divine Saviour, in the journeys they took through the villages and towns of Judea, often came to visit them during the night, with the solicitude of a father, to see if they had covering enough, if they were exposed to the cold; and when He saw them suffering, He spared nothing to relieve them. He deprived Himself of rest, and passed the night in thinking

about the comfort and well-being of His disciples. What charity! What tenderness! Well, this is what He does for you now; yes, do not doubt it, He is always with you, night and day. He sees all that you suffer; he counts all your sighs, every moan of your heart; and if He does not cure you in your sickness, it is because He knows that it would not be to your advantage, and because He wishes you to acquire additional merit. He acted thus with His Apostles; He foretold them all they would have to suffer for His name; and not one of His apostles did He spare, they had all to pass through the fire and sword of persecution; but their faith was their support.

They believed what their good Master had told them, that after sorrow, would come joy; after the combat, the victory and the reward. Convinced that God was with them, they braved every torment, and found their greatest happiness in the midst of tortures.

2. Reanimate then your faith; behold a God present by your side, a God who loves you infinitely—and who loves you the more, the more you are afflicted. He is always near you; He speaks to you in your inmost heart in the most touching manner. Oh! it seems to me that I hear Him addressing you in these loving words: My dear child, you know that I am your Creator, your Saviour and your God; you know that I hold you in My hands; I give you the air you breathe, and

the bread you eat : I employ the elements, the stars, and the angels, in your service ; and it is for no other end, but for your sake, that I have created the heavens and the earth, and all their glories. Nor was this enough—you know that I love you, and that I have carried My love for you so far as to become a slave for your sake, that I was born in a stable and died upon a cross, with all the heavy penalties upon Me, which you had deserved by your sins. After so many proofs of My affection, can you possibly believe that I should wish you any harm ? Having washed you in My blood, fed you with My flesh, and delivered up to you all that I possessed, Body, Soul, Life, and Divinity, could I give you any greater proofs of My good-will ? Could you expect any further evidence of it, than I have given you ?

Do not suppose that the afflictions you suffer are the effects of My hatred, or that I sent them to you to crush you under their weight. I give them to you with the same affection with which I gave you being, and I give them to you with the same Hands, which for your sake were nailed to the cross. If I, your Lord and Master, was not able to enter into My glory, but by sufferings and humiliations—do you think that you can ascend to heaven by any other path ?

Do you not see that men purchase temporal blessings at the cost of much labour and at the peril of their lives—and that earthly crowns are

only given to those who have previously fought for them, and gained the victory? And do you think that eternal blessings should not cost so much as temporal ones, or that the crowns of heaven are not so precious as those of this world? If you share in My sufferings, you will also share in My joy—if you accompany me in My sufferings, you will also be with Me in My glory—but not otherwise. If I had known of anything better than sufferings, you may be sure I should have imparted to you the knowledge of it, and I should have chosen it for Myself, when I came to dwell upon earth. But seeing nothing more advantageous than sufferings to enable man to reach the height of happiness hereafter, I have given you sufferings even with the same hand, with which I took them for Myself. It is I Who offer you this chalice to drink, it is I Who have sent you this sickness, this humiliation, this misfortune; and beware of casting any blame upon others, as if your trouble came from them. Do not accuse any one whomsoever, as the cause of your misfortunes: neither men nor devils, however great their malice and their power, can injure you, if I do not give them permission to do so; neither their rage nor their power are of any avail, without My appointment and My will. It is then to Me only, that you ought to refer all the chastisements you receive. Every affliction comes from the same God Who created you, and Who carries you written on His

heart and in His hands. Afflictions are the caresses which My heavenly Father is wont to bestow on His best and most deserving children ; they are the thorns of My crown, the relics of My cross, which He distributes among His favourites ; it is out of this chalice He made me drink to the very dregs, and this, because I was His first-born, and the dearest of all His children.

3. Will you not reply to these divine words : “ O Lord, my God, O my Father, let it be according to your good pleasure ; Even so, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Your sight.” I have nothing more at heart, than to follow Your Divine appointments, and to submit myself to Your guidance. Since you wish that I should suffer, I wish to suffer ; and since You have ordained that I should suffer in this way, and not in any other which might be less painful, I submit to it ; yes, O my Lord, I submit to it, and I conform myself entirely to Your wise and loving Will. I bless and praise You with my whole heart, since such is Your good pleasure. I have such great confidence in Your goodness, and in that infinite love, of which You have given me so many proofs, that I cannot have any thought or feeling contrary to Yours. I believe that as You have created me in order to raise me to the height of happiness—You will, with the same intention, watch over and preserve me—and that riches or poverty, honours or humiliations, health or sickness, will alike lead me to this blessed end.

Such are the sentiments of those who abandon themselves into the hands of God, of those who commit themselves entirely to the guidance of His loving Providence. This act of abandonment is of such great merit before God, that He often rewards it with the greatest favours.

After Attila, King of the Huns, with an army of 500,000 men, had burnt Cologne, taken Trèves, Cambrai, Metz and several other cities, and left behind him sad and fatal marks of his career—he came to the town of Troyes, intending to treat it with the same barbarity. St. Lupus, who was then its Bishop, went to meet Attila, clad in his episcopal vestments, and accompanied by his clergy.

He inquired of Attila who he was, that after having subdued so many provinces, and overthrown so many cities, he should wish to subject the whole world to his empire. Attila replied ; “I am the scourge of God ?” “Who can resist the scourge of God,” answered the holy Bishop ? “If you are the scourge of God, come and strike us, as He permits you to do so.” These words, instead of irritating Attila, appeased him. He did no harm to St. Lupus, nor to any of his people ; and if he entered the city, it was only to pass through it. Behold the result of this prudent reply, and of this heroic resignation to the Divine Will.

4. Perhaps God only waits for this act of resignation to His Will, to deliver you from all your trials. “For,” saith the Holy Spirit, “He will do

the will of those who fear Him, and who submit to His decrees." Why then do you delay to confide in His goodness? What aid do you expect to find in creatures? They have nothing to content your heart, or console you in your sufferings. God will perhaps permit them to withdraw from you, to abandon you, and even to persecute you; He will permit this, in order that when you see they have all deserted you, you should be obliged to have recourse to Him, and to cast yourself into His arms, when you see all creature-help to fail, and everything perishing around you, as in a universal wreck. A father often acts thus towards his son. He orders everyone in the house to refuse whatever he may ask, even necessities; the servants are ordered not to tender him any assistance, to take no heed to his entreaties,—so that the poor youth, finding himself repelled on all sides, deprived of all succour, and in pressing need, is obliged to have recourse to his father, to put his confidence in him as his only refuge; and this is precisely what the father wished for.

Therefore, as you are actually in this state of privation, of suffering, of humiliation, of overwhelming distress of mind,—go to God, to your heavenly Father; go to Him with confidence, it is the way to touch His heart. Beware of allowing yourself to be withheld by fear or discouragement, for we know that such hurtful thoughts are suggested to the soul by the tempter. Whether he

wishes to draw the just into trouble, or to keep the wicked in their sins, or to urge the dying to despair, the evil one makes every effort to destroy this holy confidence in their heart, and thus to deprive them of those fruits of salvation, which this holy virtue is so calculated to bring forth. To those who are timid, he presents an exaggerated picture of the multitude of their faults, he discovers to them the enormity of their transgressions, he assaults them with scruples, he would have them regard as crimes even those thoughts to which they have never deliberately consented. He suggests to them the severity of God's judgments, and he would fain persuade them that they will not be saved ; that the Lord, irritated by their sins, repels and abandons them ; and that the afflictions and evils they suffer are but the effects of the Divine wrath. Reject all these temptations as the work of hell ; abhor these feelings of distrust and discouragement ; leave to hardened and impenitent hearts, trouble, distress, and despair—but as for you, who are the child of God, or at least who sincerely wish to become so—however great a sinner you may be, and whatever may have been your crimes, cast yourself boldly into the arms of God, and be persuaded that God is your Father, and that the greater your miseries and sufferings are, the more He loves you,—that He is waiting for you,—that He is calling you—that He pursues you, to load you with His graces, and to pardon

you your sins. And how can you doubt it? Is not our Lord represented in the gospel under the figure of a shepherd, roaming through the woods and the fields, in search of the sheep he has lost? Is He not the good Father of the poor prodigal, who, in the deepest affliction at the absence of his child, goes daily to the path his son had taken on leaving his paternal home, and there awaits his return? How can you doubt that God will receive you with tenderness? He who has bound Himself by promise, and by oath, to succour you in all your wants, if you have recourse to Him with confidence! Has He not given you His word, and can the word of God fail? And have you not this Divine word in your very hands? Is it not written in the Holy Gospel?—in that book, out of which He will judge you; the book you will one day be able to show Him for your justification, if (which is a thing impossible,) He should fail to keep His promises? Oh, how you wrong Him!

Oh, how you wound Him in the apple of His Eye, as He says Himself, when you distrust His tenderness! But what honour do you render Him, when you abandon yourself to His guidance and depend entirely on His paternal Providence! What greater glory, or one more worthy of His Infinite Majesty, can you give Him, than when in the midst of the most trying humiliations, under circumstances the most saddening, in sufferings both of body and mind, such as might well drive one

to despair—you offer Him a soul calm, tranquil, and resigned to His good pleasure,—when you await without inquietude the succours He had promised you,—when you place more reliance on His word, than on any human help,—when you cast all your cares on Him,—and when you repose, so to speak, in His arms, even in the very height of the raging tempest? Yes, this is the greatest sacrifice, the most glorious homage, by which a creature can honour the Creator. It is thus that God, in the Holy Scripture, wills to be called, “the God of Hope” (Rom. xv. 13), to give us to understand, that of all the virtues, there is not one which gives Him greater glory, and proclaims His infinite perfections in a more striking manner, than the virtue of hope.

5. The holy king David understood this well, when in the Psalms, he exalts this virtue so highly. “Though I walk,” he says, “in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me” (Ps. xxii. 4). But let us see him in the midst of affliction himself, assailed by a most frightful calamity. He is betrayed by his own son; he is obliged to leave his palace, to quit his royal state, and to abandon his beloved and sorrowing people, a prey to the horrors of civil war. Behold him leaving Jerusalem, in the greatest abjection, accompanied by a few faithful followers, all weeping bitterly and filling the air with their lamentations. His unnatural son, not content with depriving his

father of his crown, wished to take away his life as well, and pursued him at the head of an army of rebels. In so many and such great reverses, and in the midst of this universal ruin,—see how David, his heart being attached to God, preserves the tranquillity of his soul ; like to a rock beaten by the waves, he continues calm and in peace, leaning on the infinite goodness of the Lord.

If he casts a look towards Jerusalem, it is to sigh over the fate of his people, and the crime of his son, whose conduct affects him more than his own humiliations. In this state of desolation and abandonment, he is so assured of the protection of God, that he does not even permit the ark of the Covenant to be removed, in which was centred the salvation of Israel. He orders the priests who had charge of it, to carry it back to Jerusalem, without fearing any profanation, saying to them : “ If I find grace in the sight of the Lord, He will restore me again to my throne, and he will show me again the Ark and its Tabernacle. But, if he shall say to me, Thou pleasest me not,—I am ready, let Him do that which is good before Him ” (2 Kings xv. 25.). “ Oh, invincible confidence ! ” exclaims a pious author,—“ Oh, Divine courage ! What honour, what triumph for God, to see a soul so faithful, and so resigned, in the midst of the greatest reverses ! Oh kings of the earth, Oh conquerors of nations, what have you done for God, in subduing peoples ? You have stripped Him of His glory, in satisfying

your own pride and vanity. Behold here a more glorious spectacle than all your conquests — it is this man, this fallen king, sitting in the midst of ruin and misfortune, as in a triumphal car, conqueror over all the humiliations and all the miseries of mankind.

Tertullian was transported with joy when he considered holy Job in his afflictions, victorious over all his misfortunes, which, like so many enemies, had vowed his destruction. "O what a trophy," he exclaims, "has God raised to His own glory, in putting Job on the dunghill! What glorious spoils He has borne off from the enemy of our salvation, when this great soul, in answer to the accounts brought to him of his calamities, only made this reply: 'Blessed be the Lord! All praise to His holy Name!' In addition to his other trials, he had to combat the importunities of an insolent woman, who gave him evil counsel, railed at his virtue, and mocked at his misery. The holy man, without losing his patience in the least, reproved her severely and rejected her cowardly insinuations. And God," adds Tertullian, "spectator of this combat from the highest heaven, rejoiced with exceeding joy. 'God laughed'—'*Deus ridebat.*' And the tempter who had raised up such immense calamities and humiliations against the holy Patriarch, on seeing his tranquillity of soul, and his confidence in God, in the midst of the saddest misfortunes, trembled with rage and despair."

6. "Of all the exercises of piety," says St. Francis of Sales, "the most noble, the most perfect, and most worthy of heaven, is to bless God and to abandon ourselves to His holy Will in our afflictions. It is the *character* of exalted and courageous souls," continues the Saint, "in their greatest trials, to fix their attention and their affection on the goodness of God, and never to cease from praising and loving Him." He relates that the daughter of an eminent physician, who was also a skilful surgeon, had fallen into a state of constant fever—but she felt no disquiet whatever on account of her sickness—for, as she knew her father loved her above everything else in the world, she said to one of her friends, who was surprised at her tranquillity: "I suffer a great deal, but I have no anxiety about getting well; I do not myself know any effectual remedy for my sickness, and I might indeed wish for one that would do me harm. Is it not by far the best thing for me to leave all remedies to my father? He knows what means are necessary for the recovery of my health—he can and he will administer to me the remedies I need. I should do very wrong to think about the matter myself, since my father will think about it for me; and as he knows and wishes to give me the medicine, which will be the best for me to take, I ought not to ask or to wish for anything myself. I shall wait then with tranquillity for whatever he may think fit to give me. And when he comes to examine

my complaint, and to prescribe the suitable remedies for me, all I shall do will be to prove to him, by my behaviour and by my looks, my filial love, and the entire confidence I have in his knowledge and in his skill."

After saying these words, she quietly laid herself down to rest and fell asleep. Her father, who thought it was necessary to bleed her, made arrangements for that purpose; and when she woke up, he questioned her about her illness, and the sleep she had just had—and he asked her if she was willing for him to open a vein, in order to restore her to health. "Father," she replied, "I do not know myself what remedy may be good for my restoration to health, and I have no will of my own in the matter; but as I am your child, it is for you to will and to do for me what you think right. As regards myself, I am content, provided that I love and honour you with all my heart—as in truth I do."

The father no longer hesitated; he bound up the arm and lanced it. While the blood was streaming from it, the amiable child neither looked at her arm, nor at the blood which flowed from it, but kept her eyes constantly fixed on her father's face, and only broke silence to repeat from time to time these words full of sweetness: "My father loves me, and I am wholly his." And as an act of thanksgiving after the operation was over, she repeated the same words, as the lively expression of

her love and of her filial confidence. And is it not true, that this young child, by behaving in this manner, manifested more love for her father, and made herself much more pleasing to him, than if she had been earnest and pressing in asking him for remedies? There can be no doubt of it.

Let us try then to imitate this conduct in all our sufferings; let us try to forget ourselves, if we can, to think only of the goodness of God. It is thus that we shall give Him the most convincing proofs of our love and of our confidence.

IV.

AFFLICTIONS LOSE THEIR BITTERNESS, AND BECOME SWEET, WHEN WE SEE THE LOVE WITH WHICH GOD SENDS THEM.

1. THE Apostle Saint Paul, writing to the Hebrews, when tried by persecution, endeavours to console them, and to alleviate their sufferings, by representing to them that their afflictions, so far from being a mark of God's hatred, were on the contrary the effect of His paternal love, and a certain pledge of their salvation. "And have you forgotten" (says the Apostle) "the consolation which speaketh to you, as unto children?" ("children," he says, to alleviate by this tender name the bitterness of their sufferings) "saying, My son"

(remark, he does not say, My servant, my slave, my enemy—but, My son, whom I love and whose happiness I wish for), “neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by Him ; for whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth—and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Persevere under discipline,” continues the Apostle; “God dealeth with you as with His sons—for what son is there, whom the Father doth not correct? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.” (Heb. xii. 5.)

Behold, how our good heavenly Father trains and governs His elect. Behold the lessons He gives them when He receives them into His family, and among the inheritors of His kingdom. “Would you know,” remarks St. Augustine, “how it is that He has never spared, nor excepted from this treatment, any one of His children? Consider that He has treated His own Son in the same manner. Yes, He who was one in substance and essence with the Father—one with Him in wisdom and in goodness—was not without suffering. It was necessary that He should feel the weight of His Father’s arm ; and as He was the First-born, and the most cherished among His brethren, He has been treated with more severity than all the rest—even to be regarded as the last of men, and to lose the appearance of a human being, by reason of His many wounds, and of the Blood with which he was covered. What! has this adorable Saviour ex-

perienced every kind of pain and sorrow, both of body and soul, all that could be suffered—and *you*, a worm of the earth, covered with sins—you would wish to be dispensed even from those calamities which in this mortal life are common to all !”

“Consider,” says St. Jerome, “all the good people that have lived since the beginning of the world to the present time ; consider their life and their occupations ; among this vast multitude you will not find one who has not received some chastisement from the hand of God, who has not been tried by some humiliations ; and they who have been most dear to Him have been the most afflicted. It is the ordinary way by which our Heavenly Father conducts His greatest friends, either to earthly honours, if such be expedient for them, or to heavenly glory, when the time comes for them to enter into its possession.”

2. We see this truth most clearly illustrated in the history of the holy Patriarch, Joseph. It was the design of God that he should one day ascend the throne of Pharaoh to deliver Egypt from a great calamity. But who would have imagined that the way to bring him to this honour would be one beset with thorns and lined with precipices ; in a word, by the way of a continual cross ? Yet such was the path which he was compelled to take in order to attain the position to which God had destined him. First of all, his own brethren threw him into a pit ; then he was sold to some Ishmaelite

merchants ; after this,⁷ being falsely accused of a great crime, he was cast into prison. But at length God, who watched over him, made known his innocence. Pharaoh summoned him to attend on his own person, and raised him to the first dignity in the kingdom. Without doubt, God could have spared Joseph all these miseries, and arranged that he should pass at once from his father's house to the throne of Egypt. But such is not the ordinary way of God's all-wise Providence. He makes the most beautiful flowers bud and bloom among the sharpest thorns. He prepares crosses and humiliations for those whom He destines to a high degree of glory in heaven. "It seems," says the wise man, "as if God decreed that honour should be merited by humiliation." "Humility, that is, humiliation, goeth before glory." (Prov. xv. 33.)

Thus the true way to attain to joy, according to St. Augustine, is to pass through afflictions. The shortest road to ascend to glory, is to descend first, by the endurance of sufferings, reproaches, and humiliations. The Holy Scripture tells us that "to them that love God, all things work together unto good." (Rom. viii. 28.)

If you find a truly good man in affliction and suffering, tell him not to give way to sadness, but to suffer with patience, and then promise him unhesitatingly, on the part of God, that if he does this, all his trouble shall be turned into joy. The Lord knows well why He treats His servant in this manner,

and he will himself one day see that all his glory and happiness in heaven depended upon it. When God strikes, He well knows where He directs the blow, and the wound it causes is always salutary ; so far from doing us harm, it contributes to our salvation. He is a charitable Physician, who inflicts pain on His patient, but only to cure him. Thus, afflictions serve not only to purify the just, to sanctify the innocent, but also to convert the sinner ; and since they always come from the hand of God, they do us great spiritual good. A young religious once complained to his spiritual father of his long illness. " You do wrong," replied the good father, " to complain of your sickness, for it will act upon you like a purifying fire ; it will purify you if you are gold, and if you are iron, it will remove the rust. God only sends you these sufferings in order to produce in you one or other of these effects."

3. History relates that Cyrus, one of the most famous architects in this world, undertook to rebuild the walls of Constantinople in sixty days, and this he accomplished, to the great admiration of all the people. He acquired such great distinction, that the streets of the city resounded with his praise. Every one lauded him, even in the presence of the Emperor Theodosius. The people cried out, " Constantine founded our city, but Cyrus has restored it." The young Theodosius was extremely irritated at hearing such acclamations in favour of the architect—and jealous at seeing him.

self eclipsed, he deprived Cyrus of all his property, under the pretext that he was an idolator. Cyrus is now reduced to the last extremity. What is to become of him? Oh, merciful Providence! It was in this very misery, and by means of it, that he found his salvation. Grace touched his heart; he became a Christian; and from that time forward he never allowed a day to pass without thanking God for having stripped him of the good things of this life, in order to give him in exchange the good things of eternity!

Who would venture, after this, to refuse to submit to the chastisements of this loving Providence, and to *reject* afflictions, coming as they do from the hand of a God, who makes them instrumental to His own glory, and to our happiness?

Why do you not approve of all God does, being, as He is, a God full of mercy? Why is it we have not His good pleasure always at heart, even when He humbles us most? Oh, let us receive from the hand of God all the calamities He sends us, and let us say generously and with still increasing love: "All that my God does, seems to me right." It is thus that we shall regard sufferings as heavenly blessings, and we shall be persuaded that the more we are afflicted, the dearer we are to God, and the nearer to His powerful help.

It is then, that peace and calm will be established in our souls, and that we shall be able to say with David, "You have crowned me with your good-

will, as with a shield"—as with an invulnerable buckler. No creature can do anything against us without Your permission. We adore Your divine Will in our regard, and the scourge with which You chastise us will be to us an occasion of merit here, and of an eternal recompence hereafter.

4. St. Lidwine furnishes us with an admirable example of this resignation. She suffered the severest pains for thirty-eight years, being always obliged to keep her bed. Yet, in the height of her sufferings, she thus sweetly prayed to God: "O my Lord, how willingly I receive this blow from Your hand, and how happy I am that You do not spare my body, but that You make it suffer! It is a sign that You design some great good in my regard. I am but a little clay, O my Creator, in Your Divine hands; give me, I beseech You, the form You think fit for Your own glory and for my salvation, and do not fear that I will oppose Your holy Will." Such are the sentiments that ought to animate us in our afflictions.

Say, then, when you are weighed down with sufferings: "It is You, O my God, who are scourging me, but the blows are dealt by such a Paternal Hand, that I cannot but love them; it is from You that I have received this sickness, but all that comes from You is so sweet and pleasing to me, that I forget the suffering in thinking how I ought to bless and thank You; because I know, O my God, that You love me, and that it is only because I am

so dear to You that You have sent me this trial."

We shall find it difficult, without doubt, to enter into these dispositions, if we consider our sufferings only in themselves, without regard to the infinite goodness of God who sends them.

"Afflictions," says St. Francis of Sales, "considered simply as afflictions, can never be entitled to our affection ; but viewed in the light of the Will of God, Who ordains them, they are worthy of all our love."

The rod of Moses, when on the ground, was a terrible serpent ; but when in his hand, it was an instrument of miracles. Tribulations, in themselves, fill us with dread ; but in the order of Providence they are the delight of those who love God.

A medicine presented by a doctor often excites a loathing in us ; but if it is offered by the hand of a friend, of a mother, we receive it with joy, because love deprives it of what is disagreeable. What cruel agony would have rent the heart of Abraham if, when it was needful to immolate his son, he had not recognised the Will of God. But viewing the death of Isaac as the appointment of God, it appeared to him infinitely precious, and he accepted it with a good and perfect heart.

Would the Martyrs, when in the midst of flames, or loaded with chains, or exposed to be devoured by wild beasts—have chanted, as they did, canticles of joy—if they had not been inspired by the

love of God, and beheld in their sufferings the accomplishment of His holy Will?

A heart that truly loves God, loves Him much more in crosses and sufferings, than in consolations—because it is the characteristic property of a strong and generous love, to wish to suffer for the object beloved. The Holy Ghost, wishing to mark the highest point to which His charity for mankind carried our Divine Lord, says that “He loved us, and delivered Himself to death for us.” (Gal. ii. 20.)

5. The enemy of our salvation well understood that this is the highest degree to which love can attain. He had learnt from the mouth of God Himself that Job was a man, “simple and upright, fearing God and avoiding evil.”

But he took little heed to this description of Job’s virtue, so strong was his hope that it would give way under the pressure of afflictions.

By the permission of God, Satan put the virtue of holy Job to the proof by the severest trials. He stripped him of all his property, he caused the death of all his children, removed from him all those who would have been able to assist him, and stirred up a bitter contention against him—which was the more trying, because it was incited by his most intimate friends, and by his own wife, who heaped upon him contempt, insults, and reproaches. Nor was this all—the wicked spirit, according to the permission which God had given him, brought upon him a terrible malady, and covered him from

head to foot with a cruel and loathsome ulcer, which rendered him disgusting and horrible to look upon.

Tertullian, considering holy Job on his dunghill, strikingly remarks: "This miracle of patience dressed his ulcerated wounds himself; he played with the worms, which covered his body in thousands—he caressed them and put them back again gently into the holes where they had bred." "I picture to myself this man of sorrows," says St. Francis of Sales, "as a great king—and in truth he is the king of all the afflicted, that have ever been upon the earth."

In this point of view, nothing is wanting to complete his regal dignity: he sits on a dunghill, as on a throne which suits his misery; the wounds, the ulcers, the corruption are his royal robes. If he speaks, in the annihilation to which he is reduced—it is difficult to distinguish whether he is a man changed into a dung-heap, or a dung-heap which has assumed the semblance of a man.

But let us listen to the words of the holy Patriarch—let us hear him speak. "If we have received good things," he says, "from the hand of God, why should we not receive evil things?" Oh, how great is the love which produced such words! Every one is pleased to receive good things; but with regard to evil things, it is only love which can receive them willingly—and in receiving them willingly, love shows itself the more perfect in pro-

portion as the evil things which it accepts, cannot possibly be made desirable, except from the infinite respect it feels for Him Who sends them.

Let us then love a God, so infinitely worthy of our love—and we shall not find any pain in our afflictions. Pain, did I say? They will become our delight, and we shall not cease to bless them, and to bless God for them ; because they will render us happy in this life, and they will be our crown of glory throughout eternity.

ACT OF ADORATION OF THE WILL OF GOD.

I submit, O my God, to all the dispensations of Your adorable Providence. I abandon myself with confidence to Your adorable will. I place myself entirely in Your Hands for the care of my body and the salvation of my soul—for health and for sickness—for life and for death, for time and for eternity. I believe, O my God, that my sickness comes from You ; and it is Your Paternal Hand which has sent it to me for my greater good.

I accept the state of suffering, to which Your will has redeemed me ; I accept pain and infirmity, and even death itself, in order to render to Your Infinite Majesty the glory and the obedience which I owe You. Is it not just that, by an entire submission to Your decrees, I should acknowledge Your absolute dominion, Your supreme independence and Your sovereign authority over every creature ? Is it not just that I should render to the greatness of

Your Being, the homage which is due to It, by the annihilation of my own? Is it not just, that by the loss of my life, I should honour Your immortality?

What a consolation it is for me, O my God, to know that my life is in Your Hands—those Hands which created me and redeemed me! How happy I am to know that Your eyes are always upon me, that You carry me in Your Arms, with the tenderness of a father for his child! And that if You call me to Yourself, it is only from Your immense desire to take entire possession of me, and to make me eternally happy.

Yes! my Lord and my God, I believe that You have manifested the greatest love in sending me this affliction. You have stricken me to heal me. You have chastised me to make me better. You have humbled me with sufferings in this life, in order to crown me with joy in the next. And the great consolation You thus afford me, by a treatment at once so merciful and so severe, is to make me like to Your Divine Son.

O Jesus, dying upon the cross, for the love of me, come to my aid in the state of distress and affliction to which I am now reduced. You are the true Consoler of sorrowing hearts, the only Hope of minds depressed, the Strength of the weak, the Refuge and the Health of the sick. Whither shall I go, O my Saviour, if not to You, to find some comfort in my afflictions? Remember

that You have endured so many torments, in order to give us a model of patience in Your own Person, and a source of consolation in all our trials. You suffered Your Father to abandon You while You were on the Cross, in order to merit for us the grace that, after You, He would forsake no one in his last moments.

O Jesus, my Strength and my Patience, permit me to come to You, to take refuge under your Cross, to embrace Your feet and Your hands which were nailed to it, for my love. Let some drops of Your precious Blood, O my Saviour, flow into my soul, to purify it from all its stains. Deign to cast Your Divine eyes on me in my sickness. Inspire my heart with a holy resignation in my sufferings. Grant me a share in that perfect submission which You always showed to the decrees of Your Heavenly Father. Make me a faithful disciple of Your obedience to His will. May I regard as singular favours, the opportunities You offer me of suffering. May my dependence on those about me (which is also Thy divine appointment) keep me always humble and submissive, whatever may occur during my sickness.

May I always receive afflictions as coming from Your Paternal Heart, which only desires my salvation and my sanctification.

O Mary, Mother of God—sinner as I am, I dare to call you my Mother and my Patron—remember that you have never rejected the prayer of any one,

who implored your assistance in affliction. Behold me then at your feet. O Mary, look upon me, laden with sin and misery. I come to abandon myself to your care, and to invoke your help. Do not despise the prayers of your poor child in his sickness. Pray for me, O Mother of Mercy ; obtain for me of your Son, the grace to live, to suffer, and to die for His love.

St. Joseph, the Patron of a good death, pray for my salvation. Amen.

PART THE SECOND.

OF THE HAPPINESS OF AFFLICTIONS.

I.

THE AFFLICTIONS OF THIS LIFE ARE OF AN IN-
ESTIMABLE VALUE.

1. ONE of the most difficult truths to understand, and still more to appreciate, is that which our Divine Lord came into the world to announce, "Blessed are they that mourn;" that is, blessed are they who endure poverty and humiliations, sufferings and crosses. And yet this truth is a kind of abridgment of all our Lord's doctrine. Infallible as this Divine oracle is, coming as it does from the mouth of the Son of God, and powerfully as it has been confirmed by the examples and teaching of the saints, it will always appear to the majority of Christians, and, I venture to add, even to persons of piety, as a paradox. They will regard it as heretofore the Pagans and the Jews regarded the Cross—that is to say, as "foolishness" and a

“scandal.” And if one speaks to them of the happiness of afflictions, they will be tempted to imitate those unbelieving disciples who, on a certain occasion, left our Lord with the remark, “This is a hard saying;” this is too hard for us to comprehend, we cannot understand it. But if you cannot understand the words of salvation, you will be obliged to understand those of condemnation pronounced on the day of the last judgment: “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.”

Remain, then, with Jesus Christ, like the faithful apostles, and say to Him as they did: “We will not leave You, O Lord, for to whom shall we go to know the truth if not to You, Who have the words of eternal life? Instruct us Yourself, open our hearts, in order that we may know the value and the happiness of sufferings.” “Learn, my child,” the Saviour will say to you in reply, “that those who are most dear to my Father have the most to suffer. Do not think that happiness here below consists in having consolations. No, it consists in enduring much, with patience, for my love. Rejoice, then, if you have to share in My sufferings: in this My Father bestows on you the greatest of His favours.” (Revelation of our Lord to St. Teresa.) The carnal man has a horror of afflictions, because he sees them only from without; if he could penetrate into what they contain within, he would see them filled with so many graces, and so much unction, that he would be no longer astonished to hear

St. Paul exclaim : "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations." (2 Cor. vii. 4.)

"To pray to God," said a holy religious, "is to perform an excellent act of religion ; to labour for God is a work more excellent still ;" "but to suffer for God," according to St. John Chrysostom, "is a work more glorious than to raise the dead, more worthy of envy than to stay the sun in its course, than to change the face of the universe and to cast out devils." The great apostle thought it unworthy of him to seek for any other glory than that which is to be found in the cross of Christ. Behold him in an inner prison, his hands and feet loaded with fetters,—he thinks himself more honoured than a king upon his throne. He counts for nothing, so to speak, his title of "Apostle of the Gentiles ;" he forgets that he has been caught up into the third heaven, he thinks only of his happiness and the glory of wearing the holy livery of his crucified God. "If I must needs glory," he says, "I will glory in the things which concern my infirmity." (2 Cor. xi. 30.) "I am in chains for Jesus Christ ; I am the prisoner of the Lord ; and this it is which crowns my joy and constitutes my real glory."

Such is ever the language of the Saints. They love Jesus Christ, and they wish to prove their love for Him by becoming like Him. Their happiness is to see themselves covered with ignominy and with reproaches for His sake. Humiliations are in their eyes the glorious garments of their Saviour.

They regard their sufferings as the infallible mark of His love, and as the most distinguished honour He could bestow upon them. "It is a great misfortune," says St. Vincent of Paul, "to have nothing to suffer in this world. They with whom every thing prospers are in great danger of being lost." What was it that made St. Francis of Assisium tremble? He thought that God had abandoned him if he passed a single day without having something to suffer.

Love then, love suffering; try, at least, to continue calm and peaceful under the hand of God; suffer with resignation, and adore the holy rigour which He exercises on your body or on your soul. It is, in truth, too much honour for you to have the Eyes of your Saviour thus fixed upon you; it is too great a glory that the Divine Hands should be humbled to so miserable and vile a creature, to mould you Himself and give you the lineaments and features of a finished perfection. Tertullian said long ago: "Man is sovereignly honoured whenever he is under the Hand of God, and when this Divine Hand works and labours at his salvation, divesting him of himself, and destroying the corrupt nature within him, by making him pass through all sorts of trials." Oh, how delightful and precious are sickness and afflictions when we regard them in the light of faith! What charms has suffering for one who recognises by the light of faith that he is a mere nothing in himself, that all is

from God, and that it is His Infinite Goodness which is making every effort to bring him to perfection, and to guide him by the ways of a loving predilection ! Do you understand what immense treasures of merit you may acquire in this state of affliction ? When is it that you can say in truth that you offer a gift to our Lord, and that gift of the highest value ? Is it not when you offer Him your sufferings ? Is it not then that He becomes, if I may so say, your debtor ? And what offering can you make Him more worthy of His greatness than that of your afflicted heart, or of your suffering body ? What can be more pleasing to His Divine Majesty than this abandonment of your health and of life itself to His holy will ? Oh, how great is such a sacrifice in the eyes of God, and how deserving of heaven is that act of renouncement made with purity of heart, and when suffering the most painful trials !

We see, then, how unjust are the complaints of those who, in their afflictions, are incessantly repeating that they are incapable of doing anything during their sickness, that they cannot give their minds to any exercise of piety, or undertake any good work, or occupy themselves with any temporal matter which interests them. Beware of being seduced by their vain sophisms. The most important affair for you is to keep yourself in peace where God has placed you. Trust to Him for all the rest. If you are not able to pray, your patience takes the

place of prayer ; your sick body speaks more persuasively to God than would the most fervent prayers. It is better for you to remain in this state of body, our Lord's victim, than to inflict on yourself the most penitential austerities, or to perform the most eminent works of piety. What good work is more meritorious, what penance is more pleasing to God, than the suffering which comes to us from His hand, and which is not vitiated by the choice of our own will ? What language is more persuasive than that of your pains ? What tongue more eloquent than the sufferings of your body ? Dismiss, then, this anxiety about your affairs, about what will happen in the future. God, who makes you suffer, can and will see to all these matters Himself ; He will take charge of them Himself for you, and arrange them better than you could do.

His Paternal Providence, which takes care of the birds of the air, as the Holy Scripture tells us, will not fail to watch over all that interests *you*. Your bed of suffering, then, should take the place of everything else, of the oratory, of the Church, of good works, and of family cares ; because God, Who wishes you to be there, will take charge of all the rest. Jesus Christ regarded His Cross, as long as His Father wished Him to continue upon it, as an object infinitely more precious than Mount Tabor, where He had manifested His glory. Thus, after His example, you ought to consider your bed

of suffering as the most suitable place for you in the whole world.

4. To suffer for God ! it is to possess the purest and most precious gold, with which you can purchase Heaven ! One single particle, so to speak, of this Divine gold, is enough to put us in possession of the glory of Paradise.

“ One moment of a light tribulation,” saith St. Paul, “ worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.” (2 Cor. iv. 17.) It is not so with our ordinary actions. We may say that the most virtuous of our ordinary actions, compared with afflictions, are only common coin, or at most but silver. With this common coin only in our possession, if we would procure an article of great value, we must have a large quantity of it. Besides it often happens that this inferior money is not genuine, but false—because for the most part, our self-love is mixed up with our good works, and deteriorates their purity. But in the crosses which are sent us from Heaven, where all is of God—in which we have no part at all but to bear them with patience and silent submission, all is of the purest gold, for it is God Himself Who operates in us ;—and what a master-piece will that be which comes direct from His Divine Hands!

This consideration leads a pious author to remark, that as no coin is current in a country which does not bear the stamp of its sovereign—and as it is the image on the metal which gives it

its value and currency, so our virtues and all our good actions are not current in the kingdom of Heaven, if they have not on them the stamp of the Cross; but when they bear this adorable sign of our salvation, they derive from it a value in some sort infinite.

Judge then, from what has been said, if you should regret the time when you are under the pressure of suffering; since by one of those moments of suffering you may acquire an eternal crown. How many crowns then in an hour! How many in a day! How many in a month! How many in a year! Oh! what treasures, what glory may you procure for yourself in Heaven! "I should prefer one of those days of suffering," said a holy religious, "to all the labours of the most mighty conquerors." When we think of that great eternity, when there will be nothing more to suffer, when we shall no longer be able to give anything to God, and when God will only have to load us with His gifts—all the miseries of this life appear infinitely desirable, and there is not a moment which ought not to be one either of the cross or of humiliation. How precious then is the time of this life, and how holy is its use, when it is spent in sorrow and suffering!

Hence it is that generous souls delight in suffering; they contrive to suffer every instant; they carefully retrench all useless conversation; they are always thinking of what sacrifice they can offer to

God, and of presenting their bodies as victims of penance, immolated to the glory of the Divine Majesty. And this is what they say, "May our consolation be reserved for the next life, and may God Who, we trust, will be eternally our glory and our happiness, graciously vouchsafe, during the short time that remains for us to live on earth, to prepare us for Heaven, by privations, sorrows, and crosses, patiently endured for His love."

5. Do not therefore call those days sad ones, on which you have the happiness of suffering for God. Regard them rather as days when you receive the most signal graces ; and firmly believe, that when all these afflictions befall you, and when the waters of tribulation fill your cup with bitterness, believe that you are in a state which would excite the envy of the Angels and of the Blessed, if they were capable of suffering ; believe that then you are the object of the attention and the particular care of God, that then you are the friend, the cherished child of His Heart. It is then that, seeing you calm and peaceful on the cross, Jesus glories in having such a faithful servant. Do you see, He seems to say to the tempter, do you see My servant, thus in trial and sickness, how he honours Me by his patience ? He is overwhelmed with tribulation, and he does not cease to bless Me ; he suffers the pains of a martyr, and he sees in these sufferings only the effects of My love ! Then the Paternal Heart of this God of all consolation is moved in

its lowest depths ; He would not leave such great generosity without instant recompence ; He pours by torrents into this soul, so devoted to His glory, the gift of the Holy Ghost. He comes to establish His abode in it, to find therein His delight, and His sweetest content. Oh, how happy then are they who suffer ! Oh, how they abound with joy in the midst of tribulations ! What they feel is a foretaste of Paradise !

But let us go still further ; and in order to understand the full value of our sufferings, let us consider them in the mystery of the cross.

St. John Damascene teaches that the Son of God has deified all the blessings of this life by His Incarnation, and all its evils, its pains, and sorrows, by His Passion ; that He has united them, in a manner, hypostatically, to His Divinity ;—so that, as we venerate whatever has touched the Body of Jesus Christ, so we ought to venerate every pain and affliction, because they have entered into His Heart ;—for there is not a single suffering which has not touched His sacred Body, or that He has not embraced, by the desires of His Holy Soul. It was with this thought that St. Anselm said, “ that he venerated all the afflictions of this life as Sacraments, that is, as having a Sacramental character. The Sacraments give grace to those who fittingly receive them, and thus the cross sanctifies all those who touch it, as they should.

And as the Son of God is always present in the

Sacrament of the Eucharist, we may also say with truth, that He is present in our afflictions. Hence those words burning with faith and love, uttered by a holy religious, prostrate at the feet of one who was sick :—" I adore Jesus Christ in this suffering body : my faith assures me of His Presence in it, in a manner less real, but more sensible than it is in the consecrated Host. I see Him present in this suffering body, but with a presence of action, not only as a physician with his patient, a father with his son, a friend with his friend, but as the soul is with the body which it animates, and as the head is with its members."

Let us consider what Faith teaches us : " Now you are the Body of Christ," says St. Paul, " and your members are His members." (1 Cor. vi. 15.) It follows, therefore, that the sufferings of the members are the sufferings of the Head ; and those of the Head are those of the members. Therefore it is, that our Saviour regards as done to Himself, what is done to the least of His members. And thus we see why our Lord reproached Saul for persecuting Himself in His members. (Acts ix. 4.) " Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Our Blessed Saviour said to His Apostles, that the bitter chalice of trials and afflictions, which they would have one day to drink, was a part of His chalice. " You shall drink of the chalice that I drink of." (St. Mark x. 39.) And again : that the laborious baptism of His sufferings would be

a portion of their own baptism." "And with the Baptism wherewith I am baptised, you shall be baptised." St. Peter, in his Epistles, establishes the same doctrine: "Rejoice, if you partake of the sufferings of Christ." (1 St. Peter iv. 13.)

And St. Paul tells us, that when we are loaded with calumnies and reproaches, we share in the reproaches of Jesus Christ. (Heb. xiii. 13.) Such then are the glorious vestments of those who suffer.

7. Do you now understand the value of sufferings? Do you believe that it is no exaggeration to say that their value is inestimable? Your sufferings are the sufferings of Jesus Christ. What are we to conclude from this? Is it enough to support them without murmuring? Is it enough to bear them with patience, even to receive them with joy, with love? Ought we not to treat them with respect, to honour them with profound veneration, and under the Divine impression of these sufferings, to experience a holy awe, as if they were united to the most holy Humanity of our Saviour? Your sufferings are the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Say then, with St. Paul: "And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii. 20.) It is not I who suffer, it is Christ who suffers in me; my tribulations are a continuation of His tribulations; my sufferings are a relic of His sufferings; my cross is a portion of His cross; my pains, a participation of His pains. If then we live by faith, O how happy are we in these afflictions! for then we em-

brace them as so many portions or parts of the cross of our Saviour, we receive humiliations, reproaches, sickness, as so many drops from the chalice of this Man-God. Our sufferings are the sufferings of Jesus Christ ! This thought is confounding to the mere human intelligence ! The sick man on his bed of suffering, is then another Jesus Christ, renewing, in a manner, the sacrifice of Calvary, or rather completing it, in one of His members !

For it must needs be, that all His body should suffer : and when a Christian does not suffer, we can say that one of the members of Jesus Christ is not suffering. It is in this sense St. Paul says: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ." (Coloss. i. 24.)

Our sufferings are the sufferings of Jesus Christ ! What glory ! What merit for a Christian in tribulation, to offer up his own sufferings as the sufferings of God ;—sufferings of infinite value, sufferings which have redeemed the world, and peopled Heaven with the Blessed ! If heretofore the Lord thought Himself honoured by the sacrifices of animals, offered to Him on His altars, because He saw in those sacrifices of the Old Law an image of His beloved Son, Who was one day to be immolated to His glory, and because the fragrant incense they exhaled represented to Him the sweet odour of the merits of this adorable Son, what shall we say of a suffering Christian, a true member of Jesus Christ ?

Does he not represent to the eyes of our Father in Heaven, an image of His Son on the Cross? Is not the sacrifice he offers to God of His sufferings, a true figure of that on Mount Calvary? "No, no," exclaims St. Ambrose, "it is not a figure of that sacrifice, it is the actual continuation of it; for it is certain that the Son of God was immolated in the Martyrs, that He suffered in them all their torments, and consequently He suffers still in all the afflicted, and He completes the sacrifice of the cross, while suffering in all its members."

8. Oh, how happy are you then to suffer! How you ought to glory in your tribulations! If you are enlightened by faith, you have rather to guard yourself against vain-glory, than against discouragement, or sadness; for your sufferings are the glorious livery of Jesus Christ, your bed of pain is the royal throne of His cross!

"O Father," said a holy nun to her director, "if I saw myself covered with ignominy, charged with the most shameful calumnies, dragged along the streets as a victim of public execration, a prey to every sort of ill-treatment, and every kind of suffering—I should think myself so honoured, in such a glorious state, that I should fear that a feeling of pride would arise in my heart, and that I should have to make every effort not to give way to a temptation to vain-glory."

"Forgive me, O my God," exclaimed the pious Archdeacon of Evreux, who saw himself covered

with the most atrocious and the most public humiliations : “forgive me, Lord, but have You not made a mistake? You send me crosses and humiliations, who by my infidelity have merited only that You should have prepared for me in Your vengeance, applause and honour. You treat me as one of Your friends and favourites ! Once more, O Lord, I ask You, have You not made a mistake?”

It is reported in the life of St. Dominick, that this great servant of God was visiting a penitent of his, named Bonne. The poor woman had a horrible cancer in her breast, in which large worms were bred and nourished, who were devouring her while she was alive. Night and day she endured the most cruel martyrdom, but always with admirable calm and patience. The saint, having come to see her as usual, asked her to put one of these worms in his hand. The pious woman would not at first consent to his request, but St. Dominick pressed her so urgently, that at length she gave way, when, wonderful to relate! the worm was no sooner in the saint's hand, than it was changed into a precious pearl. The companion of St. Dominick advised him to keep it ; but the poor woman conjured him not to occasion her this trouble, and to give her back the worm, which she called her pearl, not knowing that it had been changed into a pearl. St. Dominick gave it back to her, and when it was placed in the wound, it resumed its previous form, and became a worm as before.

What joy, what happiness to live thus, under the weight of trials! Is it not to be loaded with pearls, to be covered with diamonds, and enriched with gold?

II.

THE AFFLICTIONS OF THIS LIFE ARE A PLEDGE OF PREDESTINATION.

1. THE predestination of Jesus Christ, according to St. Thomas and all theologians, is the model of our own, not only as regards the end of predestination, which is to make us children of God, and to put us in possession of eternal life, but also with regard to the means by which we may obtain it. St. Augustine calls the Son of God, "the clearest light of predestination and of grace;"—because the knowledge of the predestination of Jesus Christ, makes us to know our own. "We have not," he says, "a more illustrious model of predestination, than Jesus Christ Himself." Let every one of the faithful, then, who wishes to know in what way he is predestinated, cast his eyes on Jesus Christ, and he will see the order of his own predestination in that of our Divine Saviour. This is what St. Paul gives us to understand in those well-known words: "And whom He foreknew, He

also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son." (Rom. viii. 29.) Our Lord had announced this truth beforehand to His Apostles, when He said to them, "And I dispose to you, what My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom." (St. Luke xxii. 29.) It is clear then, that the predestination of the Son of God, is the model or prototype of our own : that it is the mould in which our predestination is to be cast. For upon what is the predestination of Christ established ? What are its foundations ? I answer, that there is no truth more frequently repeated in the Holy Scripture than this : that the predestination of Jesus Christ, as to the Beatitude of His Body, the glory of His Name, and the title of Saviour, in its grace and its effects, is founded on the cross and its sufferings.

This is the reason that, when conversing with the two disciples who were going to Emmaus, sad and discouraged at having seen their good Master succumb to the efforts of His enemies, He said to them : "O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the Prophets have spoken ;—ought not Christ to have suffered these things (that He should have been persecuted, calumniated, scourged, and nailed to an infamous cross), and so to enter into His glory ?" And beginning at Moses, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things that were concerning Him, how they had spoken of His passion and death ; and thus our Lord bore

testimony that, according to the eternal decrees of God, He could not ascend to Heaven, but by sufferings. (St. Luke xxiv. 26.)

St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews, confirms this truth. In order to encourage and console them in their afflictions, he urges several powerful motives, and he reminds them especially of the example of Jesus Christ. "Do you wish," he says, "to be patient in your tribulations? Consider the patience of the just, who have gone before you ;—looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith,"—Who did not enter into the joy of His glory, but by means of sorrows and the cross. (Heb. xii. 2.) Remember that He has taught you this doctrine by His word, and that He has fully illustrated it by His example, by the most perfect acts of patience. Keep then the sufferings of Jesus always before your eyes in order that this consideration may fortify you in your tribulations, and may hinder you from falling into discouragement.

2. These two truths being supposed—that the predestination of Jesus Christ is the model of our own, and that it is founded on the cross—we must necessarily conclude that our predestination must also be founded on the cross—first of all, by the merits of the cross, since no one can be saved but by virtue of this Tree of Life, and by the merits of Him Who hung upon it ; and in the second place by patience in bearing afflictions, and the cross. Thus it is evident that, in order to reach Heaven,

we must necessarily follow the path of sufferings ; we can only ascend to Heaven by this ladder, and enter it by this gate ; and it would be great folly to imagine that God would trace out a new path for those who were unwilling to walk in the way of the cross.

“It is through many tribulations,” says St. Paul, “we must enter into the Kingdom of God.” (Acts xiv. 21.) “And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. iii. 12.) Our Lord Himself has declared, that “the gate that leadeth to life is narrow ;” that Heaven is taken by violence ; that the way that leads to it is strait, and strewn with thorns ; that whoever does not deny himself and take up his cross, is not worthy of Him, or of Heaven ; that blessed are they that mourn, who are in trouble, in poverty, in humiliation, in sickness ;—and if they endure these trials with patience, they shall one day be consoled, that their sorrow shall be changed into joy, and that a few moments of light affliction shall obtain for them an immense and eternal weight of glory.

3. God could, without doubt, predestinate and save us, without obliging us to pass through suffering and tribulation ; but He has not willed to do so—because His Infinite Wisdom has decided that the way of the cross would be more glorious to Himself, more meritorious for us, and more perfect in itself. He is Master of His own treasures ;

He offers them to us at His own price—and in truth, that price is a very low one ;—for a momentary suffering, to enjoy an eternity of happiness. Besides, is it not reasonable, that we who are sinners, should be obliged to follow that same path to Heaven, which the innocent Son of God Himself took in order to lead us to it? And since we are to be the inheritors of His glory, is it not just that we should also be partakers of His cross and sufferings? “If we suffer with Him,” says St. Paul, “we shall also reign with Him.” (2 Tim. ii. 12.) Thus God, faithful to the order which He has established for the salvation of mankind, sends affliction to His children and to His elect; sometimes He deprives them of their property, sometimes He permits their reputation to be assailed—or he leaves them a prey to bodily pain, to great distress of mind, to aversions and dislikes, to aridity, and many other afflictions.

All the saints have been led by this path; and God has always tried them more by tribulations, in proportion as they were more pleasing in His sight. Mary, the Queen of saints and angels, whose soul was free from the slightest stain, was of all creatures the most afflicted—because after Her Divine Son, She was the most beloved of God, and because He had destined her to the highest degree of glory. Behold St. Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin, what had he not to suffer, through poverty, persecution, temptation,

and exile? Jesus, Who loved him so much, and called him His father, did not enter His home, without bringing the cross and all its accompanying trials.

Thus it was with the Apostles and all the just. "Some," says St. Paul, "were racked, not accepting deliverance, that they might find a better resurrection. Others had trial of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bands and prisons: they were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins, being in want, distressed, and afflicted, wandering in deserts and mountains, and dens, and in caves of the earth." (Heb. xi. 35.) "As for me," says the Apostle, in another place, "I think that God hath set forth as Apostles the last, as it were appointed to death; because we are made a spectacle to the world, and to Angels and to men. We are fools, for Christ's sake; even to this hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no fixed abode; we are reviled, and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it; we are blasphemed, and we entreat; we are made as the refuse of this world, the off-scouring of all even till now." (1 Cor. iv. 9.)

Such is the heritage of God's best friends. "It is thus," says St. John Chrysostom, "we recognise St. Paul as a true Apostle, not by the great revelations he received, but by the per-

secutions and the sufferings he endured for the Saviour. Many are troubled," says this holy Doctor, "when they see a just man suffering some misfortune, such as sickness or poverty. Do not they know, then, that such is the treatment reserved for those who are most dear to God? Did not Jesus Christ love Lazarus? He loved him so much, that the Jews, seeing Him weep at his tomb, exclaimed: 'See how He loved him.' When Martha and Mary told Jesus of their brother's sickness, they only said to Him these few words: 'He whom Thou lovest is sick.' And yet Lazarus suffers; Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, endures the agonies of a mortal sickness; behold him in his anguish, in his sadness, in his desolation, in his agony,—but Jesus does not come to help him."

What then does He wish us to understand by this conduct, if not that great and eternal truth, that the cross, that all the tribulations of this life, are not real misfortunes, not a desertion on the part of God;—but on the contrary, that they are the means of salvation, and the sure pledges of the Divine friendship. "Blessed then," says St. James, "is the man that endureth temptation; for when he shall have been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him." (St. James i. 12.)

4. Let us then cling to this truth, so solidly established, that we cannot be saved but through

the merits of the cross of Jesus Christ, and also, unless we carry our cross with patience, as He did. Let us impress profoundly, let us engrave on our minds, the remarkable words of St. Augustine : " If you are not among the number of those who are afflicted, you are not among the number of the children of God, or of the predestinated ;—for as the Holy Ghost saith by the mouth of Solomon (Prov. iii. 12), whose words are repeated by St. Paul (Heb. xii. 6), ' Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth ; and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' " " Oh," exclaims Tertullian, " how happy is the servant whom his master himself corrects, with whom he is angry, and whom he unceasingly reproves and punishes ! " " Is it not a sure mark," says St. Jerome, " that a father has a great love for his son, when he takes the trouble to mould and instruct him himself." Does not a master correct the disciple in whom he remarks an apt disposition for virtue and for study ? When a doctor leaves off dressing the wounds of his patient, and ceases to visit him, is it not clear that he despairs of his case ? Thus it is with regard to us ; and the most terrible sign of God's wrath, is to abandon the sinner to prosperity and joy. " My indignation shall not rest in you " (said the Lord to the children of Jerusalem, abandoned to the most frightful disorders), " and My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will cease, and be angry no more, and I will keep Myself in peace in your regard—that is, I will leave

you without punishment, to enjoy your criminal pleasures without correction." (Ezech. xvi. 42.)

God acts, in regard to the just, in a manner directly the reverse of this. He refuses them what would attach them to this earth. He corrects them, He chastises them, He scourges them with every kind of cross, in order that they should one day be worthy to share His own glory.

5. Sufferings, then, are the seal of predestination, which God stamps on all His children. This is the reason why the angel of whom Ezechiel speaks, marks all the predestinate with the sign of the cross, and calls them the men who weep and mourn. (Ezech. ix. 4.)

After this how shall we be able to complain of our afflictions? Ought we not rather to rejoice at them? St. Bernard was overjoyed when the Lord sent him some fresh misfortune ; on the other hand, he trembled, lest he was in the way of perdition, when he was without trouble. "We must not be content," he says, "to be submissive and happy in our afflictions,—but we must love them, and ardently embrace them, for they are the pledge and the precious seed of eternal life. The sufferings of this life," he says, "contain great blessings : it is a vessel of clay, if you will, it is a field of little worth in appearance ;—but within it, beneath its surface, there is hid a treasure of the greatest value. Happy is he who finds this treasure !" Only the eye of faith is able to discover it. St. Paul had found

it when he said : " A few moments of light tribulation, work out for us an immense and eternal weight of glory." This great Apostle rejoiced in the midst of insults, of poverty, of sickness, and of all sorts of afflictions. " I exceedingly abound with joy," he exclaims, " in all our tribulation." (2 Cor. vii. 4.)

6. Let us listen to one of the martyrs of Japan, Father John Baptist Machade, of the Society of Jesus. He wrote as follows, from his prison in 1617. " For twelve days I have been shut up in a dark dungeon. I return thanks to God for having given me such great repose of soul,—that I know of nothing dearer to me in the world, than this captivity. I have never so well understood the power there is in the words of the Holy Scripture, and the courage they inspire in the condition in which I now find myself. The united might of the whole world appears to me but weakness, in comparison with the strength with which I am clothed, armed as I am with confidence in God, and clad with His strength, as with an impenetrable buckler. It seems to me as if I were a match for all hell. For forty days I have been in severe pain, which has been so increased by the damp of my prison, situated in the middle of a marsh, that I cannot sleep, either by day or by night. I count this as one of the greatest blessings I have received from the Divine Majesty. I thank God for having vouchsafed to remember me, and to give me such great courage, that all the hardships and all the torments

in the world, I could count as nothing. Our Lord, faithful to His Word, never abandons those who cast themselves into His hands. He visits them in prison, He assists them in their sufferings, He helps them to carry the yoke of His Holy Law,—and the heaviest part of it He takes upon Himself. I return Him thanks then with my whole heart. I should joyfully conform to His Holy Will, even had I to remain in a still worse and more wretched prison, to the day of judgment. I assure you, and I say it with truth, I would not exchange the state I am in for all the empires of the universe. It seems to me that, with God's help, I am now fulfilling a part of the duties of my vocation, since I am a prisoner for having announced the Gospel of my Saviour." He adds that he had been filled with extraordinary joy on three days of his life; the first, was on the day when he entered into religion; the second, when he was cast into prison; and the third, when the warrant was signed for his death.

III.

AFFLICTIONS LEAD US BACK TO GOD.

1. It would be impossible for God to allow you to groan under the weight of crosses and afflictions, if He did not know the great advantages you

derive from them. He is too alive to our sufferings, to take pleasure in seeing us crushed under them.

“We have not a High Priest,” saith St. Paul, “who cannot have compassion on our infirmities.” (Heb. iv. 15.) For, in order to show how He is touched with the tribulations we suffer, He has willed to experience them in His own Person.

History tells us of a tyrant who, having remarked that an unfortunate criminal, while uttering his shrieks during his punishment, had a strikingly pleasing voice,—gave directions that he should be put to death as slowly as possible, in order to prolong the barbarous pleasure he took in listening to his cries. How far is our Lord from such brutal hardness of heart ! So far is He from taking pleasure in seeing us suffer, that He consents to feel all our pains Himself. See how His Divine Heart was melted with compassion, when He beheld the multitude, who followed Him into the desert, fainting for want of food :—“I have compassion,” He said, “on the multitude.” (St. Matt. xxv. 32.) He meets a poor widow woman bewailing the death of her son :—“He is moved with mercy.” (St. Luke vii. 13.) What tears did He not shed at the grave of Lazarus—or rather at the disconsolate state of Martha and Mary, whom their brother’s death had plunged into bitter grief. What was the intention of our Divine Saviour, in giving us so

many proofs of His kindness, and of the sensitiveness of His heart ?

It was to convince us that He sympathises with us in all our afflictions, and that our sufferings are, in a manner, His own. If these tribulations were not the source of very great blessings to us, could He behold us thus afflicted, and not exert His Almighty Power to deliver us from them ? We should then be able to say with the Jews at Bethany : " See how He loved Lazarus." But if He loved Lazarus as much as He manifests by His tears that He loved him, why did He not hinder his death ? Was He, Who opened the eyes of the man born blind, unable to cure His friend when sick ? Could not this God, Who governs all creatures as He will, prevent these sad and mournful events which overwhelm us, and which excite His compassion ? Whence comes it then, that this Lord and Master of all things, loving us as He does, does not make our life more happy and agreeable ? Whence is it, that He plunges us into misfortunes, which He appears to feel so much ? There must be some mystery here. There is a mystery, but not an impenetrable one to the eye of faith. It must be that these calamities are of use to us ; if it were not so, there would be a contradiction between the sentiments and the actions of God. He would love us, and He would hate us : or else He would be deceiving us by a false appearance

of compassion, or He would lack the power to help us.

2. Behold that poor mother ! she is trying by a thousand caresses to quiet the cries of her infant child ; she bathes it with her tears, while the surgeon opens an abscess, piercing the flesh with an instrument, the mere sight of which terrifies her tender heart. Yet who can doubt, since the operation is performed under her own eyes, and by her own wish—who can doubt that, cruel as it may be, it is for the good of the child ; and that it will effect either a perfect cure, or at least tend to alleviate other longer and more acute sufferings ? I may say the same with regard to your own infirmities. God, whose kindness and tenderness are infinitely greater than that of all the fathers and mothers in the world—this God who carries you in His Bosom, and Who has declared so earnestly, that whoever touches you, touches the apple of His Eye ;—this same God sees all that you suffer, He is the witness to all your pains ; yet He permits them, although He could deliver you from them. How can you doubt then, that these trials are intended for your greatest good ?

But, moreover, tell me, when it has been a question, in His thoughtfulness for you, of sparing you sufferings which would have been of no spiritual use to you whatever, is there a single means against which our Lord has forgotten to guarantee you ? All suffering after death, whether

in hell or in purgatory, may be regarded as without utility, that is, in so far as that, even by the sufferings of purgatory, we cannot gain an increase either of merit or of glory. Whether in hell or in purgatory, we are there to suffer; though in the one we suffer eternally, for punishment only—in the other, we suffer for a time, for expiation and purification.

But what has Jesus Christ not done in order to save us from these fruitless sufferings, whether in hell or in purgatory? He has made use of every means, as far as was possible, even to inflict these sufferings on His own innocent Person. It is for this He shed His Blood, and that He died on the cross. Yes, the Son of God abandoned Himself to the wrath of His Father, and to the fury of the Jews, to hinder us, not only from burning in hell to all eternity, but from being detained a single moment in the flames of purgatory.

Yes—though the Holy Spirit had not called blessed those who suffer in this world—though the Holy Scripture had not spoken in favour of adversities—though we had not seen that they are the ordinary portion of the friends of God; nevertheless I should believe that they render us an infinite service. And to convince me of this, it would be sufficient to know, that He Who preferred to suffer the most horrible torments, rather than see me condemned even to the slightest punishment in the next life, is the very same Who sends me the afflic-

tion which I now endure, and presents me Himself with this bitter chalice, of which I am obliged to drink here below. A God who has suffered so much to exempt me from all suffering hereafter, would not make me suffer as I do this day, to give Himself a useless pleasure.

We may say then, when we see a Christian abandon himself to sadness, on account of the trials he meets with : here is a man who is sorry for his own happiness ; he prays to God to deliver him from this affliction, and he ought rather to give Him thanks for having favoured him with it. No greater blessing could have happened to him, than that affliction which is the cause of his sorrow. This disgrace, this trial, is the most certain pledge of the friendship of God, and the mark of his predestination.

3. Do we not see clearly from the Holy Scriptures, and the writings of the Fathers, that adversities are the most ordinary means which God employs to bring back to Him His children who have gone astray, and thus to oblige them, by a sincere conversion, to quit the career of sin, and to embrace with their whole heart a life of virtue ?

“It is well for me,” says the royal prophet, “it is my happiness, that You have humbled me,—that You have scourged and punished me ;—without this chastisement I should, perhaps, never have reflected on my conduct, I should have continued far from You in the wanderings of my heart ; I should never have

learned Your Law, never followed Your precepts ;—but the weight of Your arm thus falling heavily upon me, has opened my eyes,—I have entered into myself,—I have condemned myself for my sins. Yes, it was when I found myself in tribulation, that I cried unto the Lord ; I addressed my prayer to Him, and He heard me. In my distress, I sighed and wept, I invoked His Holy Name, and He vouchsafed to hear my voice. Oh, how desirable are afflictions, since they have brought me back to my God ! It was in the time of my misfortunes, in the midst of my humiliations, that I felt the piercing thorn of grief ; then it was that I turned to my God.” (Ps. xxxi. 4.)

“What then is this blessed thorn,” asks St. Bernard, “which works such a marvellous cure ?” And he replies : “Your thorn is the suffering you now have, it is your sickness, it is this humiliation, this poverty, this calumny, which troubles you,—this loss which saddens you, which urges you to impatience, and almost drives you to despair.” Let this thorn then, which is intended to produce such a salutary effect, do its work. In the hands of God, it is the instrument of mercy, to snatch you from death ; it is the surgeon’s instrument, which wounds and pains you for a moment, in order to cure you and save your life. Weep, weep aloud, if if you will,—doubtless you may do so ; but leave this charitable Hand alone,—do not be impatient with this Surgeon Who is so full of kindness, Who

loves you so much the more, as He does not hesitate to employ the most painful means in order to cure you. Wait patiently, a little while, and you will be happy. Oh, then how you will bless your afflictions ! Oh, how desirable your sickness will appear then ! With what joy, with what love and gratitude, will you then chant the beautiful canticle of Tobias : " I bless thee, O Lord God of Israel, because Thou hast chastised me, and Thou hast saved me ; and behold I see my son Tobias." (Tobias xi. 17.)

Sin had closed my eyes, and the punishment you have sent me has opened them. Oh, salutary chastisement ! Oh, happy affliction ! Oh, holy and delightful thorn, which has called me back to my God ! Oh, charitable cruelty of God's mercy ! He torments us because He loves us ; He wounds us because He wishes to heal us ! He sends us sickness for a few days, to spare us an eternal sickness, and an eternal death.

4. It is affliction, it is the thorn of sorrow, which has made all the saints, and which has brought back to our Lord an infinite number of souls who were lost in a life of ease and of self-indulgence. Behold King Ezechias. The Holy Scripture records that his prosperity had swollen his heart with pride ; he had forgotten what he owed to God, and he became tepid in His service. What does the Lord do to recall him to Himself ? He sends him a severe sickness ; and He warns

him to put his affairs and his house in order, for he was to die. The king, seized with fear, turns to God, and beseeches Him, with torrents of tears, to have mercy upon him. He acknowledges his sins, and God spares him. (Isaias xxxviii.)

Manasses, his son, had corrupted the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and had caused all the people to commit great sins. At first God employs mildness. He speaks to Manasses with kindness, and makes known to him the enormity of his transgressions. The unhappy king would not listen to the Lord. Then to oblige him to return to his duties, God calls in the Assyrians: this hostile people fell upon Judea, seized Manasses, and having chained him as a slave, and put fetters on his hands and feet, they led him captive to Babylon. Nothing less than such a disgrace and humiliation as this would have opened his eyes. It was only when he saw himself bound in chains and cast into a dungeon, that he had recourse to the Lord, and implored His mercy. Behold him then, restored to God, and consequently to life, to joy, and happiness, by means which, on account of his former infidelities, seemed the most unlikely to lead to so favourable an issue. (2 Paral. ch. xxxiii.)

Happy then are those whom God chastises in this world; they will find even in death itself, the principle of a new life. Manasses would have been for ever lost before God, if he had not been, in a manner, lost before man! He would always have

continued to be the slave of sin, if he had not fallen into the bondage of the king of Assyria. The chains which bound his will, hardened in crime, would never have been broken—if other chains, heavier still, had not fettered his limbs, and humbled his pride, under the yoke of the stranger.

How many similar instances could we mention ! The Scripture is full of them. At one time it is the insolent Pharaoh, who would not recognize or adore the Lord, till he saw his palace and his people struck with deadly plagues. Then again it is the proud Nebuchadnezzar, who had to be brought down to the condition of a brute, before he could be taught humility. What made the prodigal son enter into himself, and led him back to his father and his God ? Was it not the misery and humiliation into which he had fallen ? And again, was it not to the merits of the Cross, on which he hung with patience and contrition, that the good thief owed the happiness of believing in Christ, and going up to heaven with his Saviour ?

5. When we reflect on this conduct of God with regard to those whom He afflicts, must we not admire that infinite goodness, that immense love, which shows itself so jealous of possessing the hearts of His children, that He employs such extreme means of bringing them back to Himself, and making them submit to His law ? Oh, what joy for those that suffer, to know that they are loved by God, even to jealousy ? What glory, what

consolation to see that a God so great and so holy, seeks and pursues them with such ardour and zeal, that He will not suffer any one to have possession of them but Himself, as not deeming any one else to be worthy of having such a treasure but Himself only ! St. Augustine is seized with admiration that God, infinitely happy in Himself, has given man a commandment to love Him—as if He placed His own happiness in the love of His creatures, and as if man were the end, and in some sort, the good of God, as is remarked by St. Thomas. But how ought we be transported with admiration, to see God carry His love for us so far, as to become jealous of possessing our heart—and jealous to such a degree as to put everything to fire and the sword—to move, if I may so say, heaven and earth, in order to take off our hearts from creatures, and to attach them to Himself. Oh, how admirable is the goodness, the love of God ! How we ought to leap for joy in the midst of our afflictions, and to melt with tenderness, when we see that He loves us so much, only in order to preserve us from the greatest miseries, and to make us eternally happy ! Oh, how we ought to bless our tribulations, our afflictions, our sicknesses, since they are the surest mark of God's friendship, and the most certain pledge of His love !

The Saints have well understood this truth ! “I give you thanks, O my God,” exclaims St. Augustine, “for having chastised me, when I abandoned

myself to the disorders of my youth. You overwhelmed me with trouble to recall me to Yourself, and to save me. A violent passion, You know, O Lord, led me on to the most culpable excesses ; and, by a miracle of Your paternal goodness, You made me feel the most bitter loathing, in the midst of my criminal pleasures.

“ You did not permit, O Incomprehensible Love, that I should taste any sweetness out of Yourself, because You wished to take entire possession of me and to make me happy. You followed me everywhere, O my God, with a severity full of mercy, and You spread gall and bitterness over all my pleasures—in order to compel me to seek You, and to rejoice in You without trouble and without sadness. Continue, O Lord, this treatment so infinitely merciful ; cut off and destroy in me, during this life, what You will, provided that I do not perish in the next ; take away from me whatever might cause my ruin, and give me whatever may contribute to my salvation. Here burn, here destroy, but spare me in eternity.”

6. The glorious martyr, St. Gordius, said to his executioners, in order to goad them on : “ Tear the flesh off my body, cut it off piecemeal, make me suffer all that you wish ; do not envy me the hope of my future blessedness ; the more cruelly you strike me, the more you increase my reward.” The pains we endure for the love of God, are engagements we contract with Him. For our

wounds and bruises, He binds Himself to clothe us with a resplendent robe ; for insults, He will give us a crown of glory ; for a prison, the vast empire of Heaven ; for the unjust judgments pronounced against us, we shall have the praises, and the benedictions of the Angels and the blessed.

Once more let us listen to St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch. Writing to the faithful in Rome, whither he was going, by order of the Emperor Trajan, to be exposed to wild beasts in the amphitheatre, he says : “ I beg you not to shew me an affection that might be prejudicial ;—let me become the prey, the food of the wild beasts. May God grant me this grace, that they may be more cruel than usual, that so they may tear me to pieces, and break all my bones ;—and not spare me at all, as they have done several of the martyrs, whose bones they dared not touch. If the lions, if the tigers will not come to me, I will go to them, to irritate and provoke them to fury against me. Pardon me for using such language ; I know what is good and useful to me. I begin now to be the disciple of Jesus Christ—since I have no wish for the things of sense—I have no other desire than to enjoy Jesus Christ in Heaven. May I be exposed to fire, to the rack, to the wild beasts, and to every torment, provided I possess my God and my Saviour. I have no other desire.”

How great must have been the love which expressed itself in such burning words as these ! If

we do not feel within ourselves such an ardent zeal, a charity so perfect, let us at least strive to correspond with God's love for us, by patiently enduring the afflictions which He sends us, only in order that we may be happy with His happiness, through eternity !

IV.

AFFLICTIONS RAISE US TO A HIGH DEGREE OF PERFECTION.

1. THE Holy Ghost teaches us, in different parts of the Holy Scriptures, that sufferings produce in us the effect which fire has upon gold. You know that the fire destroys and consumes in the gold all there is in it which is foreign to its own nature, and thus gives it that admirable glitter and brightness which render it so precious in our estimation. It is thus that God purifies those souls which He destines to great glory in heaven. He makes them pass through the fire of tribulation, and subjects them to it so long as He judges it necessary, in order to make them holy and perfect with the brightness of every virtue. "If we wish," says St. Gregory the Great, "that a perfume should exhale its sweet odour, we must first burn or crush it ; in order to yield the juice of the vine, the grapes

must be trodden in the wine-press, otherwise they would dry up and corrupt. It is the same with our souls ; without the trial of sufferings, they will but produce little fruit of sanctity, and will never exhale and diffuse the sweet perfume of pure and solid virtue."

Our Lord Himself, in the Gospel, compares our souls to a grain of wheat, which must necessarily be buried in the ground and die, before it can germinate and bring forth fruit. In fact, however fertile the soil may be, and whatever may be the labour of the husbandman, if the seed does not die, there is no hope of a harvest ; but when it shall have been buried under the manure, and exposed to the various influences of the atmosphere—to the wind, the rain, and the sun—when its primitive substance shall have been annihilated, then the husbandman may expect a plentiful harvest. It is the same with ourselves ; if we wish to bear, and one day to gather in, abundant fruits of virtue, we must necessarily die to ourselves by patience, whether by being put under the manure of humiliation, or by being exposed to the action of sorrow and suffering. This truth, so terrible to nature, is the very foundation of Christianity ; it rests upon this principle, viz., that the life we receive at our birth is the life of sin, a life of corruption—in a word, the life of the old Adam which can only bring forth children of wrath ; therefore we must cause this vitiated life to die within us, in order

that the life of Jesus Christ may spring up in its place. For it is Jesus Christ alone Who produces in us the fruits of grace and sanctity. Now there is nothing that destroys and consumes this life of sin, this life of the senses, so thoroughly, as the fire of sickness.

Hence it is the means which God always employs in regard to those whom He loves the most, and whom He wishes to bring to a high perfection. St. Paul complained sometimes to our Lord of his temptations and of his afflictions, and he prayed to be delivered from them. "That is not for your good," replied our Saviour. "My grace is sufficient for you ; know that power is made perfect in infirmity." (2 Cor. xii. 9.) These words enlightened the great Apostle ; from that time he gloried only in his infirmities, in his sufferings ; he regarded them as a good, which urged him on to run in the way of sanctity. Thus we see him taking pleasure in labours and in afflictions. "For which cause, I please myself in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ." He was only strong in virtue when his body was weak and languishing. "When I am weak," he says, "then I am powerful." (2 Cor. xii. 10.)

2. All the saints, with St. Paul, have acknowledged the same truth, that when the body is full of health and without suffering, it is a great obstacle to sanctity. "The wax," says Didacus, in his Treatise on Perfection, "when it is as hard as a

stone, cannot take the impression of the seal ; it must first be softened by the application of heat, or by the warm pressure of the fingers. In the same way God can with difficulty impress the image of His perfections on the soul, if it is not prepared, and as it were softened by the infirmities of the body, for health and prosperity make the soul hard to the touch of grace, but sorrow and suffering make it tender."

If the husbandman wishes to prepare the soil to receive the seed, and to bring forth its fruits, he knows well that he must first employ the sharp edge of the plough, and furrow it throughout its whole extent. It is the same with the soul ; it is necessary that infirmities should plough, and in a manner furrow the body, in order to dispose the soul to receive the seed of the Word of God, and to enable it to bring forth the fruits of virtue. This truth is also represented to us in the clearest manner in the Gospel, by the beautiful comparison of the vine. "I am the Vine," said our Lord to His Apostles, "and My Heavenly Father is the Vine-dresser ; it is He Who takes away every branch which does not bear fruit in Me ; and every one that beareth fruit, He will *purge*, that it may bring forth more fruit." (St. John xv. 1.) We clearly see the meaning of this parable. The branches that already bring forth fruit, represent the just who practise virtue, but who do not, in the eyes of the Heavenly Cultivator, make sufficient progress.

They advance but slowly in sanctity, and the fruits they bring forth are not abundant, and rarely come to maturity. What, then, will the Divine Husbandman do? He will use the pruning-knife, to cut away all useless branches; He will not spare the Vine; He will make all the incisions which may be needed to remove whatever may be an obstacle to its fecundity. We see in this parable an image of the care which Jesus Christ takes in our sanctification. He employs afflictions to make us fruitful in virtues, as the vine-dresser makes use of the pruning knife, that his vine may bring forth more and better grapes. "Oh, what marvels," says St. Augustine, "are wrought in us by sufferings; how they arouse the soul that sleeps in tepidity; how they humble the proud; how they purify the heart of the penitent; how they enlighten those whom their self-love has blinded; how many graces and crowns they bestow on the just and innocent!" During the Deluge, the more the waters increased and multiplied on the earth, the higher did they lift the ark of Noah towards heaven. The waters of tribulation do the same for the soul; the more they multiply upon us, according to the designs of Divine Providence, the higher they raise and carry us towards God.

3. You are greatly mistaken, if you think, as some do, who are little experienced in the ways of God, that this state of affliction in which you are languishing, is an obstacle to your perfection,

because you cannot do as you desire, or because you cannot give yourself to your usual exercises of piety, nor practise good works, nor do any penance. Be assured that your condition of suffering is precisely the way which will lead you, the most surely and the most efficaciously, to a high degree of sanctity. A cross sent by the Holy Ghost, and in which our own will has no part, advances us far more in virtue than the greatest austerities which we impose on ourselves, even during whole years. However much we may mortify ourselves, when we do so by a movement of our own will, we act with regard to our soul as an apprentice who would like to give a few touches to a painting, which his master has in hand. It is possible that he may have some success in his attempts; but after all, his labour will remain imperfect; at the best, it will be but a rough sketch, which will not improve the picture, and the painting will never bear the stamp of a finished work. It is the master's hand that is wanted to give it those fine touches, which will make it a master-piece, and will ensure it the highest price. It is thus that we are all in the hand of God. He has undertaken, as a Divine Painter, to finish the portrait of our souls, by sufferings and tribulations. He consents that we should put our hand to the work, by mortifying ourselves; but as our self-love makes us diffident, we use the brush in a most imperfect manner. It is for the Divine Painter Himself alone to give the

master-touches, Who by a single stroke can give to the soul more beauty and perfection, than we should be able to give it by repeated touches of our own skill during long years. This advantage arises from the profound acquaintance God has of our nature, and because He knows all the touches necessary to adorn and enrich His work, and make it pleasing in His eyes. The sanctification of a soul sometimes demands that God should employ the most terrible means, and should deal it such violent blows, that it lies prostrate, and, as it were, annihilated under His mighty Hand. We must then come to this important conclusion: that he who knows how to allow God to work within him, and has learned how to keep himself constantly under His hand, not wishing for anything else but what passes within him, and what God does there; such a one has found out a great secret, and the shortest road to sanctity. Oh, when you thus die to yourself, in order to leave God full liberty of action, and of working for your perfection—when you have no other care, nor any other desire, than incessantly and lovingly to acquiesce in all His operations—what rapid progress will you make in a very short time, under the direction of so great a Master!

4. "It is one of the secrets of medicine," says St. Gregory the Great, "to cure an internal inflammation, by the application of heat to the skin, by means of a blister; and the pain and heat we then feel on the surface of the body cures the in-

ternal malady, which sooner or later might have ended in death. God sometimes acts in this way," adds the holy Doctor, "with His servants. His Eye, which is infinitely pure, discovers within us some secret vice hidden in the bottom of our heart ; it is the sudden poison of self-love, which insinuates itself, almost without our knowledge, into our holiest actions, and like a barrier, stops the effusion of His graces, and thus hinders our advancement in virtue. What does the Lord do, jealous as He is of our love, and wishing to take full possession of our soul, and to see it advance daily in perfection? Like a charitable physician, He employs the most violent remedies to cure us ; and without consulting our will, or our delicate humour, He destroys and consumes by painful operations, by sicknesses, or by humiliations, the secret evil which ruined all our piety.

What happens to us, then, if we bear this trial well, if we submit to it with resignation and patience? Oh, what a change does it produce in us ! What seemed to give us death, has given us a new life. We can advance towards perfection with astonishing rapidity ; nothing now can stop our course ; every vicious affection being now consumed, we bound forward as a giant, in the way of sanctity. We run to crosses, as the sensual run to pleasures ; we embrace humiliations, as the ambitious do honours. A short time since, we were extremely sensitive to the least pain, and

now sufferings are our delight ; we love sickness ; infirmities are dear to us ; we thank God for them ; we would not be without them ; we wish to die with Jesus on the Cross, and to remain on it all our life. We keep our loving eyes ever fixed on this Divine Saviour crucified ; we unite ourselves interiorly with His sufferings ; we desire to give love for love, life for life, and at every instant, at every sigh, we offer Him the sacrifice of our suffering body, as a living victim to the glory of His Majesty. Oh, what progress do we make in virtue, when we are afflicted, and patient in our afflictions ! We are like an eagle," says a holy Religious, "and we fly and advance perpetually, with incredible speed, to a more profound, more sublime, and abundant possession of God !" Do you wish then to become a saint ? In all your tribulations, place yourself in the Paternal hands of the Lord ; leave this God of goodness to act, let Him do with you what He wills. He has no other will than your sanctification. Do not be alarmed at the crucifying ways in which He leads you ; He will sweeten them with many consolations, provided you keep yourself in peace. Under His guidance you ought to have a greater esteem for a single operation He makes on you, by sickness, or by humiliation, than for all you might be able to do yourself, even till your death, by an infinity of pains and labours of your own. Your mortifications, without doubt, are very pleasing to God, since the end you have in view is your sanc-

tification ; but after all, it is always ourselves who are then acting and operating, and we do not know the strokes which should make us saints. Besides, our natural tenderness for ourselves makes us so delicate in our own regard, that we always spare ourselves, and take care not to strike too hard.

5. We need a Divine Hand to give the decisive stroke, which alone can sanctify us by striking and wounding us, in a manner so much the more effectual, the less the Divine will consults our own, and mortifies us in what is most dear to us, and in that which touches the very centre of our being : and it is then when God acts with this apparent severity, that we must bless His holy appointments, and respectfully adore the particular cross which seems to us so heavy. Oh, how precious such crosses ought to be to us,—since we may become great saints by lovingly acquiescing in all that happens to us, just as we see the marble become a perfect statue under the chisel of a great sculptor. Be then simple and docile in the Hand of God. Do not offer any resistance to His strokes, and you will become a beautiful and finished statue, worthy of being placed by the Divine Sculptor in the temple of His glory.

Do not think, however, that I would oblige you to reject the ordinary remedies in time of sickness, or any innocent alleviation in your affliction ; this would be to act in opposition to Divine Pro-

vidence. Make use of such means of alleviation or solace, as reason, enlightened by faith, would authorize you to take ; but do not, I beseech you, resemble those over-delicate and fretful invalids who do themselves so much injury, and give so much trouble to those around them, by their immortification, and by their seeking to gratify their fancies and their sensual inclinations. Though it is well to make use of remedies, and to take what is usually offered to the sick for their relief, yet it is not virtuous, in order to recover our health, to seek after such alleviations with anxiety or sensuality. For you may be sure that neither health nor life itself is so precious as to be purchased at so dear a rate. Oh, what excessive care is taken, under the pretext of health, to give the body all that the senses and the flesh demand ! How many sick do we find who lose in a few days all the virtues they have acquired by the labour of many years !

Whence comes this strange disorder ? I have told you before, that it comes from our impatience in enduring our sufferings ; so true it is, that the most efficacious means with which God furnishes us to work out our sanctification, become an occasion of ruin to those who are impatient and unmortified. You will prevent this misfortune by adopting this important maxim, always to remain sweetly and tranquilly in the present state in which God has placed you, without wishing for anything

else than what He actually gives you, whether for the body or the soul. Remain, therefore, without impatience in the crucible of tribulation, if you wish to come forth from it as pure and as bright as gold, resplendent with glory and virtues.

6. Cassian relates that a religious, who was not different, as to exterior matters, from the rest of his brethren, yet reached so high a degree of perfection and sanctity, that he cured the sick by the mere touch of his religious habit. His superior, thinking this very extraordinary, expressed to this religious his astonishment, that, without his doing any more penance than the rest, without fasting or watching or praying more than the other religious of the monastery, he should yet be able to work miracles. The good religious replied that he was himself still more astonished at it than his superior, and that he did not know at all how it was ; but if he might guess at the reason, he supposed it was that he had always taken great care to be content with the will of God in his regard, and whatever untoward event might happen, to keep himself in peace. “Prosperity,” he said, “does not elate me, nor does adversity depress me ; but I take everything equally from His hand. I never ask that matters should turn out as I might naturally desire, but only as God wishes them to happen ; thus, whatever takes place, I am always in peace. When I suffer, I say to myself, ‘It is God who wishes it so—may His name be blessed,’ if I

meet with contempt, I love this abjection, because I see in it the Holy will of God, which I adore above all things, in all the events of life." "But, brother," rejoined his superior, "were you not moved when that wicked man set fire to our Grange, and all the corn was burnt and all the cattle as well?" "No, Reverend Father," replied the holy religious, "my custom is to give thanks to God in all such events, because I am persuaded that He only permits them to happen for His own glory, and for our greater good. This is the reason why I am not anxious to know, whether we have much or little to live upon; being convinced that if we trust in Him, He can as easily feed us with a morsel of bread, as with a whole loaf; and thus, everywhere and always, I live content and in perfect repose. Yes, Reverend Father, by the daily offering and abandonment of myself to the will of God, I find myself in such dispositions, that if I knew that, by an irrevocable decree of His Divine will, I was to be damned for ever, I would not, in the least, resist this holy will, nor revoke it, if I could do so, by the mere recital of one Pater Noster. No, I would never do it. I would demand of God two things only; the first, that His most holy will might be accomplished in me during all eternity; and the second, that in this extremity of eternal woe, He would grant me the grace never to have the least thought contrary to His holy designs."

The Abbot, greatly astonished to find in his religious such a resolution and such sublime perfection, no longer wondered that he worked miracles.

V.

THE NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES OF AFFLICTIONS.

1. To induce you to suffer your afflictions with patience and with resignation, there is no motive more powerful than the consideration of the Passion of the Son of God. Let us then go together to Calvary—what shall we see there? “Three men,” says St. Augustine, “each fastened to a Cross. One of these, from His cross gives salvation, the other receives it—the third loses it. In the midst, is Jesus Christ, the one pre-eminently Just, the Author of grace, Who suffers voluntarily, and Who is meriting by His sufferings the salvation of all the guilty. On His right is a penitent sinner, who suffers with submission, who is converted, and receives on the Cross the assurance of an eternal happiness. On His left is a rebel, a sacrilegious adversary, who revolts while under the rod, rejects grace, and begins his hell in this life. What a lesson is given us here! Let us not turn away our eyes from a spectacle so full of instruction.”

Jesus Christ teaches us in His own Person, the

necessity of suffering, a necessity imposed on all men alike. He shows us in the good thief, with what clemency He treats those who suffer as His children ; how much He loves them when in their sufferings they unite themselves to Him, and what a glorious recompense He destines for them. In the impenitent thief, He condemns all obstinate sinners who, with rebellious hearts, blaspheme and curse the Paternal Hand which strikes them ; and He teaches us what fearful vengeance, what a terrible judgment He exercises on those who do not humble themselves under His Mighty Hand. Therefore, in order to suffer with patience, let us consider the Son of God on the Cross ; let us look upon Him, and do according to the model He there presents to us. "He has given us an example," saith the Holy Spirit, "that we should do as He has done, and should follow in His steps. For He that has not the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to the Apostle, is none of His, and will not be saved." (Rom. viii. 9.)

Now the Spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of patience, which is nurtured by sufferings, and which delights in afflictions. Thus Jesus Christ is called by the Prophet Isaias, "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity." (Isaias liii. 3.) What language ! Might we not say, that the Eternal Word, on coming into this world, reduced Himself to such a state as to know nothing else but affliction, and so far as experience went, to have no

knowledge or feeling, except of what was bitter and trying, to feel nothing but sorrow and suffering? It is thus that we see nothing on His sacred Person, when hanging on the Cross, but wounds and blood, and that there is no part of His Body which has not experienced the violence of some particular torment. Does it not seem as if Jesus Christ lived only to suffer, and to teach us to suffer; as if His only occupation was to suffer, that His business was to suffer; and the moment He can suffer no more, then only does He wish to die.

Behold then this Man of suffering, suspended on the Cross, between Heaven and earth—having no support for His Body but the nails with which His Hands and Feet are pierced. In the agony of death, when our Divine Saviour's strength was exhausted—after having prayed to His Heavenly Father to pardon His executioners, and all sinners—after having given us His holy Mother to be our Mother, in the person of St. John—He calls to mind that He has endured all that had been predicted by the Prophets, with the exception of the bitter drink, which had been promised Him in His thirst. Do you think that He will spare Himself this bitter drink, with which an unpitying Jew would drench His tongue? Do you think that He will remove from Him this last outrage, intended only to torment Him in His agony? No, He will ask for it; He will not allow Himself to lose a single drop of the bitter chalice of His Passion. "Jesus," saith

St. John, "knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst." It was only then that, seeing in the eternal decrees He had nothing more to suffer, He cried out, "It is consummated !" that is to say, "In this world, as its Redeemer, I have nothing more to do—I have suffered all !"

2. O Jesus, O Friend of those who suffer, Who came to unite Yourself with our infirmities—Yes, You can die now, there is no more suffering for Your further trial—Your acquaintance with sorrow and infirmity is complete. You have run the whole career of sufferings, it is time to die. "Then Jesus, having said, 'It is consummated,' I have suffered all, everything, *then*, bowing His Head, He gave up the ghost." It was thus He measured the duration of His mortal life, by the duration of His sufferings. But to form an idea of the extreme love He had for sufferings, and the value He wishes us to set upon them—we must always bear in mind and consider well, that Jesus Christ did not wish to suffer only what was necessary to expiate our sins. In that case we might have thought that He regarded afflictions, rather as a necessary evil, than as a blessing to be wished for ;—but not content with dying for us, and by this sacrifice paying His Father all the debt Divine Justice exacted of Him—He wishes still farther to satisfy the ardent love of suffering which devours Him. He thinks of His own joys, which are crosses and ignominies. "He

wishes," says Tertullian, "before He dies, to satiate Himself with the pleasure of suffering. His death would suffice, it is true, for our salvation; but death did not satisfy His avidity for suffering—the thirst for suffering which consumed Him. He must add to the agony of the death upon the cross, the scourging which made long furrows in His Body—the crown of thorns which pierced His Head, and other tortures, which caused Him unknown pains and torments."

At the view, then, of this God, all covered with wounds and reproaches, are you not convinced of the necessity of suffering? Do you not see the *Law* of suffering written on your Model, in characters of blood?

What! You owe your life to His sufferings. It was on the Cross that you were born—it was amidst His sufferings you were brought forth; the grace which sanctified you, only flowed into your soul through His veins so cruelly torn. And you think to be saved without passing through tribulation! You claim to be saved, and you are unwilling to bear the character, the distinctive mark of your Saviour! "Has He not suffered for us," says the Apostle St. Peter, "leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps?" (1 Peter ii. 21.) Must we not be partakers of His death, if we are to be partakers of His glory? And do you not hear Jesus Christ Himself telling you that you must resolve to carry your cross after Him, as He

carried His? Are we not His members, and will there not be something wanting to the Passion of Christ, if He does not suffer in us, what He has willed to suffer in His own humanity? "Who now rejoice," says St. Paul, "in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in My flesh, for His Body, which is the Church." (Colos. i. 24.)

Ah, look at the Body of Jesus Christ, from the crown of His Head to the sole of His Feet, there is no part sound and entire, every part is bruised, mangled, and covered with blood. In the Garden of Olives, the Blood burst forth from every pore, and fell to the ground in large drops; and what is signified by this, but that His members should be prepared to give their blood, and bear stamped upon their brow, the mark of His Cross and of His sufferings? You are happy then, you are in the way of salvation, when you suffer any affliction with humility. You are then the companions of the Saviour, the faithful imitators of His life, and you have the sweet pledge of your eternal happiness. It is this great lesson the Son of God gives us in His own Person, by showing us the necessity of suffering.

3. But let us see, in the example of the good thief, the fruit we should gather from our sufferings. There is no truth more certain or more frequently repeated in the Holy Scripture than this—that God loves in a particular manner those who suffer;

and why? He not only sees in them the image of His Son, but He regards them as penitent victims who, with an humble and contrite heart, offer Him the most pleasing and the most glorious sacrifice. Experience teaches us but too often that the sinner loses in prosperity the remembrance of his sins. Is he afflicted? is he struck down by sickness? Then forthwith the thought of the Divine Justice is aroused within him, and makes him confess his criminal life.

The good thief on the Cross offers us an example of this. See how his punishment awakens in him the fear of God, and brings before his mind the prospect of His judgments. He hears the blasphemies of his companion, and he is astonished, and with reason, that the vengeance that has fallen upon him, has not humbled him under the hand of God. "What!" he exclaims, "condemned as you are, have you not yet learned to fear God? As for ourselves," he continues, "if we are rigorously punished, we have deserved it by our crimes." "Neither dost thou yet fear God, seeing that thou art under the same condemnation, and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." (St. Luke xxiii. 40.)

See how he confesses his faults, how he kisses the Hand that strikes him, how he acknowledges and adores the Justice which chastises him. Therefore he has found the only means of changing his punishment into mercy; for the Lord, who does

not rejoice in the death of the sinner, but thinks only of the means of converting him, does not punish us in this life, except to humble us under His mighty Hand, by the abasement of penance. Let us, then, prostrate ourselves before God, and cry out with our whole heart : " O God, if we are rigorously punished, we have deserved it by our sins." Let us imitate the penitent thief, who, regarding himself as a criminal, casts a pitiful look on Jesus suffering with him, and exclaims : " But this Man, what evil hath He done ?" Oh, how this thought lessened his own torments ; if the just endures punishment, ought the guilty to complain ? It is thus that when we suffer, we should call to mind the sufferings of Jesus, and think of ourselves ; we ought to consider our own guilt, and His innocence. He has suffered as really as we suffer now ; but He submitted to His sufferings from a motive of mercy, whereas we are obliged to suffer, by a law of justice. Let us suffer, then, for the love of the Just One, for the love of the infinite mercy of Him Who saves us, Who exposes His innocence to such torments. Let us suffer the salutary correction of that justice which chastises us, but which is careful of us, and which spares us. O most pleasing sacrifice ! O victim of sweet odour ! These dispositions will do violence to Heaven, and its gates will be opened to admit us.

4. Such is the first advantage we may draw from afflictions. But further, as gold is tried in

the furnace, so afflictions are a spiritual fire which puts our virtue to the proof, and even renders it worthy of the regard of God. Fire tries the gold, and it is thus that its quality is known ; if it is real gold, the fire purifies and refines it. It is the same with afflictions. The only sure proof of our virtue is the Cross. The bravery of a soldier is tested by his conduct in battle. Virtue does not consist in show, in appearance—but in practice, and in conquest.

Without conflict, virtue cannot manifest itself. Thus St. Paul would have us attain the virtue of hope, by means of patience in trials—"knowing," he says, "that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and trial hope." (Rom. v. 4.) It is doubtful therefore whether we have the virtue of hope, till we have been tried by adversity ; and the foundation of this virtue, as of all the rest, is the exercise of afflictions. Whoever aspires to the glory of heaven, must expect to have many crosses to carry. Now it is the cross of sickness, or of some humiliation, or the loss of property. What ! you allow yourself to murmur, you are discontented, you can bear it no longer ! Ah, it is because your virtue is not solid ; it is not true gold. True piety is not consumed in the crucible of afflictions ; on the contrary they purify it, and make it worthy of God—of His notice, of His love, and of His reward.

Behold the penitent and happy thief, fastened to

the Cross ; see to what perfection his virtue has been raised, by the good use he makes of this moment of suffering. He only commenced his conversion at the very end of his life ; and grace soon makes him, as we see, a finished model of perfect patience and virtue. We have already seen him confess and adore the justice which chastises him ; he makes all the acts of a perfect repentance ; and now it is no longer a penitent who is going to speak to us, it is a saint, of whose piety we find but few examples. He sees every one rising up against Jesus Christ ; but, as for himself, not content with acknowledging the innocence of the Saviour, he turns towards Him and supplicates Him in fervent prayer : “ Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom.” What faith ! a dying man sees Jesus dying, and he asks of Him life ! Himself hanging on a Cross, he sees Jesus also crucified, and he speaks to Him of His kingdom ! His bodily eye sees nothing but crosses, but his faith shows him only crowns ! Was there ever a stronger faith, a firmer hope ? We often see Christians die, who know that Jesus Christ is living ; and their wavering faith will hardly allow them to trust themselves to Him. Our good thief sees Jesus Christ dying by his side, but he does not hesitate to place in Him all his confidence. But consider again, *when* it is he makes this act of hope ? When every one condemns the Saviour ; when the Apostles abandon Him ! “ He alone,” says

St. Chrysostom, "is left to glorify Him on the Cross. He recognizes for his Master the Companion of his death and his punishment, while the Disciples have deserted Him whom they knew to be the Author of life." "He is certainly worthy," says the same Doctor, "to be reckoned among the martyrs, since he remains almost alone by the side of Jesus, performing the office of those who ought to have been the leaders in this glorious warfare."

Do not be surprised to see him suddenly raised so high; it is because those who are patient in afflictions make great progress, when they know how to avail themselves of the advantages of suffering with Jesus Christ. It is this which raises the good thief in a moment to such high perfection; and it is thus he obtains from the lips of the Son of God that promise so full of consolation: "And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." (St. Luke xxiii. 43.) What repose, what glory, what happiness!

5. But if Calvary gives you such an admirable example of patience and humility in the good thief—of goodness and mercy in the Son of God—what a terrible instance of Divine justice do we not see in the impenitent thief, who suffers on the Cross with a hardened heart. Oh, must we now stop to gaze on so frightful a spectacle, in order to make us conceive a great horror for a rebellious soul, who abandons himself on the Cross to murmurs, to impatience, to blasphemies? whose obstinate heart

revolts against a God, Whose merciful Hand corrects him as a Father, abases only to humble him, and chastises only to convert him? No, no; let us close our eyes to so deplorable a sight; and let us fix them with love and confidence on the touching picture of a God crucified, teaching us by His example the necessity of suffering—that is, of the Cross; and by that of the good thief, the use we should make of it, and the blessed fruits we may gather from it.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING.

TO THE ETERNAL FATHER.

BE Thou eternally blessed, O my God, for having sent me this affliction. It has been to me an instrument of salvation, the principle of a new life, and the source of my happiness. Yes, Lord, it is by this affliction you have made me return to the way of Heaven, from which I was daily wandering. By means of it you have enlightened me with a ray of your grace, at the time when I was about to plunge myself into an abyss of evil. Eternal thanks be given, O Infinite Goodness! you saved me when I was about to perish inevitably. O, fool that I was! I lived in forgetfulness of Your holy laws; I followed the irregular desires of my heart. My passions—the more imperious the less they were

under control—were hurrying me along the rapid descent of earthly joys ; and were about to hurl me into the fearful gulf of crime. It was then, O my God, that You vouchsafed to look upon me with pity ; You cast me to the ground, like another Saul, to recall me to Yourself. O merciful Providence ! You have wounded, in order to heal me ; You have chastised, in order to save me ; You have sent me a slight affliction, to rescue me from a certain and eternal death ! What return shall I make to You, O God, for so great a benefit ? Ungrateful as I was ! At the moment when You were treating me with such paternal severity, my rebellious spirit resisted Your designs of mercy. I refused to submit to a salutary humiliation. I repelled from me the benefit of your chastisement. I doubted the kindness of Your heart, of which You were giving me, at the very time, the most certain proof. I regarded the chastisement of Your mercy as the effect of Your wrath, when it was the sweet pledge of Your love ! My Lord, could You give me a greater proof of Your kindness, than by sending me this affliction, in order to recall me to Yourself ? You had employed every means to withdraw me from vice, and I had rejected them all ! It was in vain, O Infinite Goodness ! that You imparted a bitterness to all my pleasures, in order to detach me from them ; it was in vain that You troubled my conscience by the voice of remorse—the voice of my passions stifled that of Your

grace—and all the means of salvation which you offered me, instead of touching my heart, hardened it still more.

What remained for You to do, O Lord, but to leave me to follow this way of perdition, and to abandon me to a reprobate sense? Your justice seemed to exact of You such a treatment. The creatures which I had abused, themselves cried for vengeance, and demanded my death, as the just penalty of so many crimes. In destroying me, O Lord, whom would You have destroyed? An ungrateful sinner, an enemy, who would then have ceased to offend You. But, O infinite charity! O Father of Mercy! You were not willing to treat me thus. You have not ceased to regard me as Your child; and while all creatures justly rose up against me, and demanded my destruction, You alone, O my God, like a compassionate and tender Father, undertook my defence, and would not allow my death. You have said to all creatures, as David of old said to his soldiers, "Spare my son, my dear son Absolom! no, take not away his life, he is the child of my heart. Save me the boy Absolom." (2 Kings xviii. 5.)

TO JESUS ON THE CROSS.

O JESUS, suffering for my love! It is to You I owe so many benefits! Yes, I acknowledge it, O

my Saviour? All these precious graces are the fruit of Your Passion; they come to me from Your sorrows; they descend from Your Cross; they flow to me from Your wounds. It was to merit these for me, that Your Heart was so filled with sorrow during all the course of Your mortal life. It is Your Heart that has demanded them for me by its prayers and its earnest wishes; and to obtain them this loving Heart devoted itself to every sacrifice, to every suffering; and it willed to be drenched with bitterness, to be covered with reproaches, broken by grief, pierced by a cruel lance, emptied of all its blood, and deprived of life. How much have I cost You, O my God! How many labours have You endured for my love! How many tears have You shed for my salvation! How much blood have You spilt for my happiness!

How can I any longer doubt Your mercy? How can I dread the afflictions that may await me in the future? What can happen to me, either in body or in soul, that will not be directed and arranged by Your Paternal Hand, for my greatest good? Yes, my present affliction, which I regarded at first with dread, has become for me a source of infinite blessings! I regard it, O my God, as the most certain pledge of my predestination. O Jesus, light of my soul! what beauty, what riches, through Your grace, I now discern in afflictions! How beautiful will they appear, when seen to be surrounded with rays of glory, in the great day of eternity! How

delightful are these sufferings when sanctified in Your adorable Humanity ! How worthy of envy, when we see that in your Divine Hand they serve as instruments to form Your elect, and to raise up spiritual temples for the Heavenly Jerusalem ! O my God, how great is my happiness, to possess such precious pearls, which will one day adorn my crown ! To have in my hand, that divine money, with which I may purchase the treasure of Heaven, pay all my debts, and satisfy Your justice ? What a consolation, O Saviour Jesus, to have such a glorious likeness to Yourself ; to carry in my body the image of Your sufferings, and the character of Your elect ! What glory to walk in Your footsteps, in the track of so many Saints ; to be marked with the sacred signs of salvation, and to be part of that privileged flock, of which You vouchsafe to be the Shepherd ! O Jesus, my Life, and my Salvation, I cast myself down at the foot of Your Cross. I come to ask You there, the graces I need, in order to persevere in the disposition with which You have inspired me. Enlighten at all times the eyes of my soul, so that I may never lose the esteem and the love of sufferings. Grant that, like the good thief, I may be the faithful companion of Your Cross, that I may always find it a joy to share in Your sorrows and sufferings, and a glory to drink of Your bitter chalice. Enkindle, O my God, enkindle in my soul the fire of Your love ; may that love which has consumed You for my sake, consume

all my affections, so that henceforth all my happiness may consist in loving You—in living, in suffering, and dying for You.

TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

O MARY, who hadst so great a share in the sufferings of Jesus, who didst assist at the Bloody Sacrifice of Calvary; and, for the love of my salvation, didst consent to His death; it is to you also, O Mother of my Saviour, that I owe the graces I have received from heaven! I know that all graces pass through your hands, and that you never turn away your eyes from the sinner, who, in his affliction, implores your aid. You are, O Mary, a Mother full of compassion, the consolation of the downcast, and the refuge of the afflicted. Hear me, O Holy Virgin, obtain for me the grace to imitate your Divine Son, in the sufferings which yet remain for me to endure. Obtain for me His meekness, His patience, His humility, and above all His ardent love; that I may return love for love. He consecrated all His life to my salvation; may I consecrate mine, also, to His love and His glory.

St. Joseph, protector of the agonizing, and patron of a good death, pray for me. Amen.

PART THE THIRD.

OF PATIENCE IN AFFLICTIONS.

I.

OF THE EXCELLENCE OF THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE.

1. "PATIENCE," says St. Thomas, "is a virtue which strengthens the soul against the movements of sadness ; it moderates and represses them, and does not permit us to do or say anything which is contrary to right reason. It also inspires us with courage to support the adversities of this life, and, in the midst of the most cruel contradiction, renders us immovable, and faithful to the least of our duties." Those few words of the angelic Doctor give us at once a high idea of the virtue of patience. However, before showing you its excellence I must point out to you its different degrees. There are two principal degrees of this virtue. The first consists in suffering with some evenness of mind, but not without difficulty ; without murmuring, but not without some complaining, which shows a

repugance to suffer. With this disposition, when sick, we ask with anxiety for every means of alleviation and solace, without however employing any that would be culpably wrong. We take care not to oppose directly the will of God, but we should be very glad if He would accommodate His will to our own.

We ask to be delivered from our sickness with an unquiet ardour, with an eagerness which comes wholly from nature ; we do not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed with our affliction, but it depresses and troubles us ; we would not certainly expose ourselves to the danger of committing a mortal sin in order to be cured ; but by our anxiety for remedies and alleviations, we often run the risk of committing many venial sins. If by such an imperfect patience we do not offend God, it is certain that we render Him little honour, and that we gather very little fruit from a state so favourable for the acquisition of every virtue. We must not then stop short at this first degree of patience ; a noble and generous heart like yours should rise higher, and aspire to a greater perfection.

2. The most perfect degree, then, of the virtue of patience consists in an entire submission to the will of God, in all the afflictions He may send us. This degree does not hinder you from feeling your sufferings, but it gives you courage to surmount them, and you will act as if you had lost, in a manner, all sensibility. You will be afflicted at the

ruin of your health, at the loss of your property, &c. ; but you will not be the less resigned to the holy arrangements of Divine Providence. Far from allowing yourself to give way to murmuring, you will not venture to utter a single complaint ; or, if by chance you do complain, your complaints will be full of love, and addressed to God with a filial confidence and tenderness ; and thus you will cast all the burthen of your sorrows into the heart of this good Father. If the violence of your pain should make you shed some tears, those tears will be the effect of the frailty of nature, and not at all from want of resignation. Perhaps some of these first movements of the weakness of nature, which escape you, may appear to be contrary to the will of God, but do not be uneasy on this account, continue calm, and you will soon be in a state to stifle these sallies of nature. In this degree of patience, far from permitting the least fault in yourself, in order to be free from your affliction, you would not take any step whatever to do so ; and if it only required a single word to oblige God to change His designs, and to accommodate His will to your own, you would not consent to utter it. This is indeed a very excellent degree of the virtue of patience, and you must endeavour to reach it. Be sure that this virtue, practised with so much purity, in your state of suffering, is infinitely more glorious for you, than if you had all the empires of the world.

St. Louis, King of France, when speaking of his long captivity in Turkey, used to say, "I am more content, and I return more thanks to God for the grace He granted me in my prison, and for the pains I there suffered, than if He had made me the master of the universe."

3. "The patient man is better than the valiant," saith the Holy Ghost, "and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh cities." (Prov. xvi. 32.) Remarkable words! which teach you not to envy the conquerors of this world. Your bed of suffering is a field of battle, where you may make the most striking and glorious conquests, where you may gain the greatest triumphs, and erect for yourselves trophies which time will never wither. "In war," says a pious author, "it costs much suffering, to gain even a little reputation for valour, but true courage is not there. We test the courage of a soldier, not by the impetuosity with which he rushes on the enemy, but by the efforts he makes to resist the attack; we judge of his bravery, not by his ardour, but by his patience."

I admire a Christian, patient in his afflictions, far more than a hundred warriors rushing into danger from blind passion.

The patient man is always master of himself, always superior to suffering, and the serenity of his countenance knows no alteration; the soldier in battle, on the contrary, has no mastery over himself, his impetuosity carries him away, and he

becomes its slave. In a suffering Christian, all is great, because he triumphs over himself ; all is noble, for he suffers for a God ; all is magnanimous, because he fights with pain,—but in calm and tranquillity. Therefore, if you consider patience merely in a natural point of view, it has an infinite claim on our esteem. “It is by patience,” says Tertullian, “that we are distinguished from the brute,—it is by patience that we act as human beings, having the use of reason.” When we lose patience, we also, in a manner, lose our mind ; our spirit is not in our own possession ; passion rules us, and thus we resemble the animals, that are without intelligence, the slaves of their appetites and instinct. “What cowardice !” exclaims Aristotle, “what baseness ! to allow ourselves to be overcome by impatience, to be carried away by anger, and to be cast down by the least trial.”

But what nobleness, what greatness, what magnanimity, what generosity, is there in bearing the reverses of fortune, the violence of pain, and all the humiliations to which our nature is subject !

The ancient philosophers have pronounced magnificent eulogiums on this moral virtue. It was, in their view, the highest point of wisdom that could be reached. Seneca elevates the patient man above all others ; and a disciple of Plato ventures to say that the wise man, by patience, makes himself, in a manner, master of God—by showing himself to be inflexible in all trials. “He

performs an art," he says, "which belongs only to the Almighty, when he suffers in patience the reverses of this life ;—for he changes evil into good, by making that voluntary, which was before but an accident independent of his own will."

4. But let us leave the sages of antiquity ; "for, as they had not," says St. Cyprian, "the true wisdom, they were ignorant also of the true patience." This Christian virtue is founded on humility of heart, that of the Pagan philosophers was all pride. It was a virtue of the earth. The patience of the Christian comes from heaven, and it is from heaven that it derives its brightness and its glory.

St. Ambrose gives us a beautiful idea of this virtue when he calls it the mother of all the children of the Church. "What does a child do," says this holy Doctor, "when it sees itself in any necessity ? It runs to its mother ; if it is suffering hunger, if any one has given it a blow, if it is in any pain, if it is sad, if it is sick, its sole refuge is to throw itself into the arms of its mother, and there it is sure to find the remedy for its troubles. Its good mother consoles, caresses, helps it, and gives it courage against all its fears and trials. A child of God should do the same. He should consider patience as a mother, and have recourse to it, in all his wants, and he will always receive great consolation from it."

In order to show us the great advantages at-

tached to this virtue, Tertullian compares it to a helmet, or rather to an impenetrable buckler, which places him who carries it, out of danger from the darts and arrows of the enemy, and saves his life as often as he repels them. Behind the protection of this buckler, he fears no wound, no mortal blows,—he smiles at all danger, he triumphs over every assault, he braves a thousand deaths, the arrows that are aimed at him fall at his feet, and even by a violent repulsion, are forced back against the enemy. “It was by the help of this buckler,” says Tertullian, “that holy Job, that glorious captain of the Lord of Hosts, endured all the attacks of the tempter; and it was by it that he repelled all his violence. Always firm in the combat, always superior to his attacks, he covered the evil one with shame and confusion, whenever he attempted to shake his virtue.”

The comparison of St. Chrysostom seems to surpass that of Tertullian. He represents to us the patience of a Christian, as an impregnable fortress. “Mount,” says this holy Doctor, “mount this fortress, and there, without any arrow, without any weapon of offence, defy the most powerful enemy. Yes, let all creatures arm themselves to overwhelm you—let every affliction, let every suffering fall upon you, like so many unrelenting enemies for your destruction—if you do not leave this invincible tower of patience, within which you are intrenched, you will always be victorious, and

all the darts of your enemies will be broken at your feet.

5. But if this virtue of patience, as we have just seen, is necessary to support us in the afflictions of this life, to fight against suffering, and to repel all the temptations to sadness and discouragement, it is not less so for our progress in virtue—for we may say that it is the foundation of our perfection. Thus St. Gregory does not hesitate to call patience, “the root and guardian of all our virtues.” Just as the root is the source from which the tree derives its substance, from which it receives the life which animates it, the vigour which sustains it, and all the fruit it bears, so patience is the vivifying principle, which causes that spirit of strength to flow into our souls, which is necessary to keep us in a state of grace. It is patience which gives life, in a manner, to all our virtues, which makes them bear the fruits of salvation, and preserves them for eternal life.

We may say of patience, what Solomon said of wisdom—“all blessings come with it.” “It is patience,” says St. Cyprian, “which enables us to dwell in Jesus Christ, and conducts us, by Him, to the Bosom of God.” This Divine virtue extends itself on every side; it shows itself in all our works, it gives them their value, and the merit which makes them worthy of Heaven. It tames the impetuosity of our passions, it represses the violent movements of pride, and consoles us in

our afflictions; it sustains us in torments, and preserves us in peace in the midst of war. It is patience which makes us humble in prosperity, content in adversity, almost unsusceptible to injuries and to contempt. By patience, we pardon the offences we have received, we support the persecutions of the wicked, and we sanctify our sufferings. Finally, patience makes our faith immovable, our hope invincible, and our charity heroic.

Tertullian also attributes to patience all the effects which St. Paul ascribes to charity. "Why," says this Father, "is charity full of sweetness? Why is it without pride or ambition? Why does it bear all things? Certainly," he replies, "it is because charity is patient."

6. If you are patient in your suffering, if you are resigned in sickness, rejoice. You are walking in the way of perfection, you are practising every virtue in an excellent manner. In fact, what faith you must have, to believe that God loves you, when He afflicts you; that He is curing you, when He wounds you! What hope, not to be moved at the sight of death; and with tranquillity of mind, and a serene countenance, to expect of God alone the cure of your afflictions! What humility, to acknowledge yourself worthy of the evils you suffer—to praise and bless the Lord for His mercy, at the time when you are laid low by the heavy blows of His justice! What charity, to immolate yourself as a living victim to the glory of His

Divine Majesty !—to make Him an offering of your sufferings, of your health, and of your life, and to return Him love for love ! Oh, to what a high degree of perfection the sick may raise themselves, in a short time, by being patient in their sufferings !

That is what the Apostle St. James has told us in his Epistle : “ Patience,” he says, “ has a perfect work”—(St. James i. 4)—that is to say, patience renders a man perfect, not only because by patience he practises all the virtues, but because it crowns them all with a glorious perseverance. “ The other virtues,” say the Holy Fathers, “ fight, it is true ; but patience alone gains the victory, and carries away the prize.”

Thus, the Venerable Bede wishes for no other mark of a consummate virtue, than that of patience. “ He whose patience,” he says, “ cannot be conquered, is thus proved to be perfect.” And St. Augustine regards patience as a gift so precious, “ that God Himself,” says the holy Doctor, “ Who by His own nature cannot suffer, has willed that this virtue should not be wanting, so to speak, to His glory ; and it was for this reason that He was made man. He created the world by action,—but He redeemed it by suffering ; and as Redemption is a more excellent work than creation, the power of suffering seems more glorious to God, than the power of acting ; therefore patience has changed its character, since God has united this virtue to His own nature ; it is no longer a servile

quality; but a royal, a heavenly, and a Divine virtue."

Tertullian, in his admirable treatise on this virtue, maintains that the Jews are inexcusable for not having, by this mark, recognized the Son of God. "The patience of Jesus Christ," he says, "was alone sufficient, even without any miracles, to prove that He was God. For to triumph over all creatures, was to raise Himself to the Creator,—and to show Himself superior to all the weaknesses of humanity, was to give a striking proof of His divinity."

7. I shall conclude this section, by the history of the glorious Martyrdom of Father Spinola, who was burnt alive in Japan in the year 1622. This great Servant of God was shut up for four years in a very confined and unwholesome prison,—a prey to every inconvenience, privation, and suffering; he had need of the most heroic courage and invincible patience to endure such long and cruel trials; and we may be sure that he would have yielded to so many sufferings, if God had not reserved him for so glorious an end. This is what we learn from the letters which he wrote from his prison to the Religious of his Order. We will quote some fragments from them, which are so many rays of the Divine light which illuminated his spirit, and so many flames of that ardent fire which burned in his heart. "How sweet a thing it is, my dear Father, to suffer for the love of

Jesus Christ ! I have learned this by experience, though I cannot express it as I would in writing, especially in a dungeon, where the fast is perpetual, and where my bodily strength already fails me. But I do not trouble myself much about it. I only regret that this exhaustion of my strength deprives me of a portion of that time which I should consecrate to prayer, and to the consideration of the joys we experience among labours endured with patience for Jesus Christ. I know from a good source that I am to be burnt alive ; it will be then that I shall be happy, when for the love of Jesus Christ, I shall be tied to a stake, and surrounded with flames ! I acknowledge that I am, in truth, quite unworthy of this grace,—but I know that the goodness of God is infinite.” After having received the certain intelligence of his punishment, F. Spinola wrote : “ I have learned with certainty that I am about to die for the Faith. I return infinite thanks to God. I can find no words to give you an idea of the gratitude and happiness I feel. It only remains for me to bid you, and those of the Fathers whom I know, farewell ! I earnestly beg them all not to regard my imperfections ; but to thank the Divine Mercy for so great a benefit, and to obtain for me the grace to die with the constancy which becomes a Religious of our Society.” This favour was granted him. He wished to enter the fire clothed with a surplice, and carrying in his hand a banner, on which he

had himself worked the name of Jesus, in beautiful and brilliant characters. But he was not allowed to keep it. Five other Religious of the Order of St. Dominic, four of the Order of St. Francis, and seven of the Society of Jesus, of whom six were novices, were tied to the stake with him. When all was ready for the fire to be kindled, Father Spinola intoned with a firm voice the Psalm, "Praise the Lord, all ye nations." The rest continued the Psalm with great joy ; at the moment when the pile was set on fire, those valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ were seen lifting their eyes to Heaven, their faces resplendent with joy. They suffered this painful torture for more than two hours, until God crowned their patience, and put an end to their suffering.

II.

THE CONSIDERATION OF OUR SINS INSPIRES US WITH PATIENCE.

1. WE have just seen how many titles the virtue of patience has to our veneration, how great it is before God, how noble and precious in the eyes of faith and of reason also, how it raises us above ourselves, what empire it gives us over our passions, what peace and tranquillity it imparts to the soul, to what perfection it leads us, and, lastly,

what glory it procures to God. This simple statement would doubtless suffice of itself to induce us to embrace this virtue with ardour ; but in a state of suffering, the interior dispositions change so often, that we have need, in order to support us in our afflictions, of a spiritual food more abundant and more varied, which might answer to the different wants of our soul, according to the different impressions and alterations it experiences. It is the thought of a pious author, who tells us it with an amiable simplicity, that our sufferings are like our food, which we must season in different ways, if we would not wish to find it insipid. We must support our trials sometimes with the thought of conforming to the Will of God, Who sends them to us ;—sometimes by a sentiment of confidence in His goodness ;—sometimes by the love of Jesus Christ attached to the Cross, at one time we will suffer in a spirit of penance, thinking of our sins ; at another, in the spirit of fear, considering the flames of hell, which we have deserved ; and again, we feel disposed to raise our hopes towards Heaven, to contemplate the magnificent rewards promised to a constant resignation in the afflictions of this life.

By meditating on these different views of faith, of hope, of love, and of penance—we shall avoid that weariness which attends the repetition of the same reflections, and we shall be greatly assisted in bearing patiently those long sufferings which may yet remain for us to endure. We must therefore

use some skill and industry, in order to divert and beguile the feeling of our sufferings. There will come moments when we shall not experience any sweetness in those thoughts, which just before had filled us with joy, even when we suffered most. The holy reflections on the goodness of God, on the love of Jesus Christ, which used to inspire us with so much courage, will no longer speak a single word to our heart; we return to them again, but we derive no strength from them; our soul, in a state of utter dryness, will languish in such weakness, sadness, and discouragement, that our pains will become almost insupportable. What must we do then, in this time of distress and of interior abandonment? Ah! how sweet it will be then, to enter again into ourselves, and to recall to our remembrance the sins of our past life, in order that this humiliating thought may inspire us with a profound feeling of sorrow, at the view of our faults;—and that we may discover by that interior light which enlightens every faithful soul, how just it is that we should suffer, to satisfy the Divine Justice, how honourable to undertake the cause of that Justice ourselves, by submitting to the adversities which it sends us, and how consoling it is to think, that our afflictions endured with patience reconcile us to God, and render us every day more and more pleasing to His Divine Majesty!

2. “When I am attacked by severe illness,” said a holy Religious, “and in great depression of spirits,

and I cannot find in myself a single good thought, a single good disposition, the remedy which comforts me is the consideration of my sins. I descend into the depths of my nothingness, into the abyss of my past transgressions, as to the last entrenchment to defend me from the assaults of pain, and the temptation to impatience. The view of my past offences against God makes me always more calm, and more resigned in my sufferings. For I say to myself, 'Is it not just that one so guilty as I am, should undergo the punishment he has merited by his sins? Is it not just that a body so stained by sin, should expiate by suffering, the criminal pleasures it has taken against the law of God? That one who has been so often rebellious against the will of his Creator, should repair, by humiliation, and by sadness, the injuries he has inflicted on the Sovereign Majesty? If I had insulted an equal, I should have committed an outrage which would demand reparation. If I had braved the authority of a magistrate, an extreme punishment would be the just consequence of my crime. If I had risen up against the king's Royal Majesty, if I had outraged him, even when sitting on his throne—a crime like this would be deemed worthy of every punishment. What punishment then have I not deserved in revolting against the King of kings—and declaring war against my Sovereign Judge, by endeavouring, as much as laid in my power, to annihilate both His glory and

Himself? No! there is not on this earth any reparation; there is no punishment, there is no suffering, capable of sufficiently expiating, I do not say a mortal, but even a single venial sin.'” “If the sea were all fire,” says St. Catherine of Sienna, “he who understands a little what sin is, would precipitate himself into that sea, never to leave it, if he feared he should meet sin on its shores. Into what an abyss of sorrow must we be plunged,” adds St. Catherine, “if we have faith, when calling to mind the sins we have committed!”

“Is it possible,” the penitent Christian exclaims, “is it possible that I have attempted the life of Your Divine Majesty? What penance could I ever do to expiate my crimes? No, Lord; if there should flow from my eyes as many tears of blood as there are drops of water in the sea, never could I offer You a just satisfaction. If I should endure on this earth for a thousand centuries all the torments of the lost, and the pains of the martyrs, it would be impossible to make sufficient reparation, even for one of my offences. Is it not then just that I should accept with love the afflictions which You send me? And ought I not to esteem myself too happy, that You vouchsafe to accept so poor a satisfaction, for all the disorders of my life?”

Such are the sentiments you should conceive when, entering into yourself, you reflect, in the bitterness of your soul, on the errors of your youth. Not only should you never entertain any thought

of complaining of your affliction, but you should even be astonished that a sinner can murmur against the merciful Providence of the Lord, and not endure with resignation the trials which are so sweet and easy a means of satisfying the Divine Justice. This was the disposition which animated the penitent thief on the Cross. See him in the midst of the extreme pains of his punishment, with what patience he supports them, when he thinks of his criminal life ! Do you not hear how severely he condemns his companion for his sallies of rage, and his blasphemies ? He is astonished that, sinner as he is, his chastisement has not humbled him under the rod which smote him, and that at the sight of the Innocent One, Who suffers in silence, he himself, guilty of so many atrocious crimes, should break forth into outrageous complaints and murmurs. "Wretched man," he says to him, "neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation. And we indeed justly, for we have received the due reward of our deeds ;—but this Man, this innocent Man, Jesus, hath done no evil, for which He should endure such great torments." "Happy robber ! You speak the truth," exclaims a pious and learned author. "No, certainly Jesus has never done any evil ; far be it from Him ! Yet He suffers, and He suffers in silence ;—whilst the culprit at His side blasphemes !" Consider, He suffers a thousand times more than we suffer ; every one rushes upon this Lamb, and in-

flicts on Him a thousand outrages, whilst you are left in tranquillity. He is covered with wounds from head to foot ; He shed almost all His Blood at His scourging ; He was loaded with curses and reproaches ; His flesh was torn to pieces ; the crown of thorns deluged His Head with blood ; all His executioners were bent on taking away His life ; but not one of them has turned against you. Jesus has endured all these cruelties with a patience and a meekness, that even His enemies were constrained to admire. What a reason is this for you to suffer your affliction and your pains with resignation !

3. Keep your eyes always fixed on Jesus crucified, after the example of the good thief ; compare His immense sufferings with your own ; see the depth of His wounds, the greatness of His sorrows, and consider the little that you suffer. See His innocence, and think of your sins. Admire His patience, His humility, His meekness—and reflect on your delicateness, your sensitiveness, your immortification. What a contrast ! And yet it is not enough to say, like the penitent thief, that you suffer justly on account of your crimes, and that Jesus has done no evil ; you must add, that it is you, a sinner, who have inflicted on Him all the pains He endures ; that it was your sins, and mine, which nailed Him to the Cross ; and it is this thought which will increase our confusion, it is this consideration which will enkindle our hatred against

ourselves, and clearly establish the injustice of our complaints and our impatience.

At the end of the French revolution, a respected Ecclesiastic was labouring for the salvation of souls in a hospital, and administering the helps and consolations of Religion to a large number of sick and wounded. This good priest was told, that among the wounded, there was a soldier, the continuance of whose life seemed a prodigy, he was in such a state of mutilation. He went to see him, and found a man whose countenance bore the impress of great calm. "My friend," said the Priest to him, "I am told that your wounds are very severe." The wounded soldier, smiling, replied: "Father, lift up the bed-clothes." He did so, and shrunk back with horror, on seeing the poor soldier had no arms. "Ah!" said the wounded man, "do you draw back for so trifling a matter? Raise the covering at the foot of the bed." He raised it, and there were no legs! "Ah, my child," exclaimed the charitable Father, "how much I pity you!" "No," replied the soldier, "do not pity me, Father, I have only received what I deserved. It is thus that I treated a crucifix. I was going to the army with my comrades. On the way we met with a crucifix, which had escaped the fury of the revolutionary soldiers; we set about destroying it. I was one of the foremost; I climbed up the cross, and with my sword, I cut off the arms and legs of the crucifix, and it fell. On

arriving at the camp, the battle began ; and at the first discharge, I was reduced to the state in which you see me. But blessed be God ! He punishes my sacrilege in this world, by the light chastisement of His mercy, in order to spare me in the next the chastisement of His justice ; at least, this is what I hope for from His great goodness."

4. But it is not only just that we should suffer in order to expiate our sins, it is also an honour. Is it not a glory for the son to take the part of an outraged father ? for a good servant, to defend the unregarded claims of his master ? for a faithful subject, to avenge the injuries done to his prince ? If Phinees has been so greatly praised in the Holy Scripture, for having revenged on the guilty Israelite the injury done to the Lord, by thrusting his sword into him, in the very act of sin ;—does not the sinner merit even honour by avenging on his own person the injuries he has committed against his God, arming himself against his own body, which has been the instrument of his sins, and piercing with the sword of sorrow, his penitent soul, the principle and seat of all his offences ? When the friends of the Emperor Augustus opposed his design of avenging the death of Julius Cæsar, his adopted father, this young prince replied : "it would be a stain on my character, and my honour would be tarnished for ever, if I did not avenge the injury done to my father and my friend, slain in so shameful a manner, in a time of peace, by

cowardly assassins, who ought to have regarded him as the Saviour of their country. No, my hatred is too just, it is my determination to satisfy it. The honour of Cæsar speaks too loudly to my heart; I must avenge it; and since he adopted me for his son, it is my duty to honour him as my father."

Such should be our language at the sight of Jesus crucified. This Divine Saviour has adopted us for His children, even at the cost of His life. He was put to death in a most shameful manner, and when dying, He left it to us to avenge His outraged glory. But on whom is the vengeance to fall? Who are the enemies of the Saviour? Do not let us accuse the Jews of His death, nor His executioners. The only executioner of Jesus is sin; our crimes were the only cause of His death. My sins, and yours—these are the enemies on whom we ought to avenge the shameful assassination of our adopted Father and Friend. Let us then draw the sword against ourselves, and take arms against the instruments of our iniquities, against these guilty members, against this sinful flesh, this criminal soul, which has so many times crucified the Son of God. However great may be our zeal to defend the honour of our good Master, it will never equal the love He had for us, nor the heinousness of the offences we have committed against Him. It will never even equal the ardour of the penitents of the desert, to avenge on themselves His glory outraged

by sin. Let us consider the striking portrait which St. John Climachus has left us of these penitents—eye-witness as he was of their austerities.

“I saw them,” says this holy Religious, “covered with poor rags, their breasts bruised and wounded by the blows they had given themselves, pale and thin, like walking spectres. Some exposed themselves to the rays of the burning sun, others to the severity of the bitter cold. Some, who were parched with thirst, would take one drop of water only—rather to suffer more than to afford themselves any relief. Others, after having taken a piece of bread, thought they were unworthy of eating more, regarding the food of animals the only nourishment it became them to take, because, they said, they had lived an entirely animal life. All these penitents spent their days and nights in sighs and tears. They uttered such lamentable cries, that they were enough to soften the very rocks. ‘We have deserved, O Lord,’ they cried incessantly, ‘we have deserved every sort of punishment. We know it is impossible for us to atone for our iniquities, even though You armed all the creatures of the earth against us. But by our tears and groans we ask for mercy; and until You have granted us pardon, we shall not cease to bewail our sins, and to avenge on our sinful bodies the outrages we have committed against Your Divine Majesty.’”

Let us suppose that one of these austere penitents were here, in your place, on your bed of pain, and

that he had to endure the same sufferings as yourself, with what patience would he not endure them all ! With patience, do I say ? What joy would he not experience, in the midst of his afflictions, on seeing himself under the strokes of the merciful justice of the Lord, so fitted to satisfy his zeal for penance, and to reconcile him to his God ! “When we have to suffer,” says a holy Religious, “we ought to be filled with joy in the midst of our tribulations, considering that our pains, endured with patience, purify us entirely from our sins, and perfectly reconcile us with God. We have seen men, distinguished for their birth, their talents, and their character, devote themselves to the greatest sacrifices, to obtain the forgiveness of their master, whom they had offended.” Great generals, whose names have been recorded in history, famous for their military exploits, have not been able to survive their grief at having displeased their prince ; they have been known to condemn themselves to the weariness of exile and captivity, in order to regain the precious favour of his friendship ; and sorely distressed at not having been able to do so, they have died from sorrow and vexation.

More fortunate than those earthly courtiers, we have not to fear this insensibility in our good Master ; we are certain of recovering His friendship, whenever we ask it, with a contrite and humble heart, and when we offer to Him, as a pledge of our repentance, the light sacrifice of our suffer-

ings and our afflictions, borne with a Christian and patient spirit.

What a motive for consolation to a loving and contrite heart ! This God, Who but a little while ago was cold in our regard ; and who, seeing in us only children of wrath, could not but regard us with an angry and menacing countenance ; now, at the sight of our humiliation and affliction, this same God, moved at the fate of His afflicted children, looks down upon our sufferings with love and compassion. He blots out from the book of eternal punishment the iniquities of our life, and reinstates us in the participation of all His graces, and all His favours.

But how much more lively is this joy, when the soul, entirely restored to God, and reinstalled on the throne of His love, casts an eye on the abyss of hell, admiring the infinite goodness of the Lord, Who has graciously vouchsafed to commute those eternal punishments, for those which are so light, and of such short duration !

Represent to yourself a great criminal, guilty of high treason, and stained with the blood of his sovereign ; he is awaiting in prison the sentence which is to condemn him to an ignominious and cruel death. Such is the prospect he has before him. What a surprise must it be for this wretched criminal, when he is told that his king, when dying, had changed his sentence into that of one hundred days' imprisonment. What joy takes possession of

his heart ! What transport ! What an excess of delight ! See him now in his dungeon : his one hundred days of imprisonment are, for him, so many days of high festival ! Such is the idea you ought to have of the joy of one who suffers afflictions, when looked at with the eye of faith ; those afflictions are a merciful commutation or exchange for the eternal punishment he had deserved. Often say to yourself then, "I have sinned, and if God had treated me according to His justice, into what frightful woes should I now be plunged ! What would have become of me in the midst of this abyss of fire ? Can I compare what I suffer, with those avenging and eternal flames ? Am I not better off on this bed of pain, than on the burning coals of hell ?" "What are all the sufferings of this life," says St. Bernard, "by the side of the eternal punishments merited by our sins !"

Such were the sentiments of a holy Religious, of whom the Venerable Bede, the first historian of the Church in England, has preserved a very singular occurrence, which happened in his time, and was witnessed by all the neighbouring country. I shall conclude this reading by relating what I found in that author.

"An Englishman," he says, "whose name was Drithelmus, a pious and respectable married man, died some days since in truly religious dispositions ; when suddenly the people saw him rise again, by a miracle which Providence vouchsafed to work for

the instruction and sanctification of a great number of the faithful. Drithelmus returned to his family, and gave a touching recital of what had happened to him after his death. 'Immediately after I expired,' he said, 'my soul was conducted by an angel to Purgatory. There I saw an abyss of an immense depth, and of vast extent, filled on one side with a sea of fire and flames, and on the other with one of ice, the cold of which was more terrible than death itself. There I saw a great number of souls horribly tormented. They passed, without interruption, from one sea to the other—from the most extreme cold to the most intense heat—and thus one extreme torment was followed by another torment of an opposite nature, still more excessive. They felt incessantly in the most inward part of their being, the most dreadful of torments, the most frightful of all punishments. Those pains seemed to be horrible. I thought it was hell; but the angel that led me, tranquillised me by telling me it was Purgatory, where every soul, though free from the guilt of mortal sin, must necessarily suffer, if it had not paid the debt of temporal punishment, due to its sins, by sufficient penance during life.'

"Such was the recital of Drithelmus," adds the historian; "and from his conduct all the rest of his life, it was evident that there was nothing exaggerated in it. He embraced a religious life, with the consent of his wife, and entered a mon-

astery, called Melrose, where he led such an austere life, that all England was astonished at it. Many went to see him as a prodigy. Sometimes they found him in frozen water, praying fervently, and asking pardon of God. When they said to him : 'What are you doing? How can you endure such extreme cold?' 'Ah!' he would reply, with a heart-rending sigh, 'I have seen many other sufferings greater than this.' He mortified his body with such severity, and wore it down with such rigorous penances, that, covered with blood as it was, it excited alarm as well as compassion in those who beheld it. They would say to him with astonishment: 'Unhappy man! why do you treat your body in this way? Why have such a mortal hatred against your own flesh? Have pity on your health!' 'No, no,' he exclaimed, 'I have no pity at all on this criminal body, which has been the cause of my sins. Ah! if I had real pity on it, should I not treat it even with barbarity, since it would have to endure in the next world pains infinitely more terrible? I have seen these terrible pains, and I am happy to be able to prevent them, by now giving myself to all manner of austerities. Woe to me, if I spare myself for a single instant. I would prefer a thousand deaths, rather than to pass a single day in the fires of the next life!' Thus spoke Drithelmus, and all the rest of his life he spoke the same language, and maintained the same conduct."

III.

THE THOUGHT OF HELL OUGHT TO INSPIRE US
WITH PATIENCE.

1. "IN all thy works," saith the Holy Ghost, "remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." (Ecclesiasticus vii. 60.) No, you will never offend God by impatience, or by want of resignation in the trials that afflict you, if you call to mind your last end, that is to say, if you often place before your eyes what may happen to you on the last day of your life, at the moment of your death, at the tribunal of God, before which you will be judged, and of the sentence which will for ever decide what will be your eternity, whether an eternity of happiness or of misery.

I do not wish to terrify you with a picture of the punishments of hell ; those frightful torments are not for you, they are reserved only for impenitent sinners. My object is only to propose for your consideration some consoling reflections, very fit to inspire you with patience in your sufferings, and to offer you a salutary means, which all the saints have made use of to sanctify themselves in their afflictions.

"The thought of hell," says a holy Religious, "far from troubling us in our afflictions, should inspire us, on the contrary, with courage, and fill

us with a holy joy. For, at the sight of those eternal flames, we may say to ourselves, 'How happy I am, not to be among the number of those unhappy victims! Yet I see what would have been my lot, if God had punished me according to His justice; I should have been suffering for a long time, and should have to suffer for all eternity, the most terrible torments. If I suffer now, at least my sufferings are useful to me, when borne with patience for the love of God; they blot out my sins, they bring peace to my soul, and they give me a promise of heaven. If the lost in hell could return to the earth to expiate their sins, what penances would they not willingly undergo! If they had had, like myself, to endure pain during their life on earth, if they had experienced a reverse of fortune, or sicknesses, or humiliations, perhaps they would have found in these temporary afflictions the beginning of that happiness they have lost, perhaps they would have understood the need they had of working out their salvation, and of saving their souls. But continual prosperity seduced them, and the good things of this world made them forget the unchanging blessings of eternal glory. What thanks ought I not to give to God, for having led me by ways which, though rigorous in appearance, have been so full of mercy!'

Such are the sentiments of the sick and afflicted, when they meditate, in peace and in confidence, on hell.

"May God grant," says St. Chrysostom, "that this holy and salutary thought may occupy the mind and hearts of all men. God grant that this thought may be written everywhere, wherever we turn our eyes, that we may read it on the walls of our rooms, and that it may become the subject of all our conversations. We should not then be found to be so sensitive to pain, so passionately fond of pleasure; the thought of an unhappy eternity would make us despise all things else, to escape its torments. If a criminal were condemned by the law to remain till death in a frightful prison, or else to suffer the most cruel punishments; if he could obtain from his judge the deliverance from either penalty, on the sole condition of thinking every day of his life on the severe punishments he ought to have suffered, would he find any difficulty in accepting a condition so easy to fulfil? No, undoubtedly, no. Is it not, then, astonishing that, having deserved to be condemned to eternal torments for our sins, and being persuaded, as we are, that we shall most certainly avoid them by supporting our afflictions with patience (which we shall do, by often contemplating the eternal pains we have merited), is it not astonishing that we meditate so little on hell, and that we even dread to fix our minds on it?"

2. St. Teresa, who had reached such a high degree of perfection, was taught by our Lord Himself to meditate on the torments of hell, in order not to

lose patience in the sufferings of this life. She tells us that, finding herself one day very sad, weighed down by interior trials and by bodily sufferings, she was on the point of giving way to so many afflictions, when our Divine Saviour appeared to her, and, to raise her courage, and to strengthen her against her depression of mind, He showed her the abyss of hell, with its punishments, and also the place she would occupy to all eternity, if she continued to live so imperfect a life. This great Saint, terrified at the sight, prostrated herself at the feet of Jesus Christ, shedding tears of gratitude and repentance, and returning Him a thousand thanks for having snatched her from so great a misery. From that time she never complained of her sufferings ; they even seemed to her sweet and pleasant, when she thought of the torments she might have had to endure ; and she ever afterwards sought after sufferings with ardour, and made them her delight. When her body complained of her long infirmities, or of the austere penances with which she mortified it, she made it descend into hell, showing it its abyss : "Look, unhappy body," she would say to it, "see the place where you ought to have been ; your sufferings are nothing in comparison with what you have deserved."

This thought St. Teresa found to be an invincible buckler, with which she repelled all temptations to impatience, and resisted all the assaults of pain.

"If you would not descend into hell after your death," says St. Bernard, "descend into it in spirit, during your life. Consider its dreadful punishments, its terrible torments, which are never to have an end ; that dark and frightful prison from which there will be no possibility of escaping. Contemplate those eternal flames, which penetrate the damned even to the most inward centre of their being, and which burn without consuming. See those chains of fire, by which the damned are bound in every part ; those legions of infernal spirits whose joy is to inflict on them the most cruel tortures. Hear the cries, the sighs, the despairing yells of their unhappy victims, and see if it is not a 'fearful and terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' (Heb. x. 31.)"

Oh ! when we find ourselves cast down by pain let us in spirit go to meditate on the brink of the precipice of the abyss of hell ; let us view the place where we might have been, had not God in His Holiness had pity on us ; let us compare the punishments of eternity with the light afflictions we have to suffer here below ; and far from complaining of our sufferings, and far from murmuring against Divine Providence, Who sends them to us, a feeling of joy and gratitude will spring up within us ; and, rising above our trials, we shall bless a thousand times, as St. Teresa did, the adorable dispensation of God in our regard. Such is the teaching of the Saints, and of the holy Doctors of the

Church, and the Saints confirm it by their own example.

3. Let us listen to what the Holy Gospel tells us concerning this truth, or rather let us hear the instruction of the Son of God Himself, which He gives us in the history of Lazarus and the rich glutton. Admirable history, in which we find all the science of Christianity, and the great secret of Divine Providence explained, in the distribution of the good and evil things of this life, and in which we learn from the mouth of our Saviour, lessons so consoling for those who suffer, and so terrible for the rich who live in the forgetfulness of God ! Let us meditate on all the circumstances of this Divine history. Let us (with the aid of those luminous and solid reflections with which the holy Fathers have adorned it) draw from it all its striking lessons, and we shall see that if the thought of hell has dreadful terrors for the worldly and voluptuous, it is sweet and consoling for those who suffer with resignation. The rich glutton of the Gospel, after a life spent in pleasure, died reprobate, and was buried in hell. His soul instead of being carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, like that of poor Lazarus, became the prey of the devil, was plunged into a pool of fire and sulphur, and compelled to have no other dwelling than hell for all eternity. See this unhappy soul, at the bottom of his fiery prison, see him stretching forth his suppliant hands amid the avenging flames. He asks

for a drop of water to cool his tongue. "I am horribly tormented," he cries, "in these devouring flames." "What despair," says St. Chrysostom, "for this rich voluptuary! He had passed all his life in joy and delights, and now he has not even a drop of water to quench his burning thirst in the fire. He sees Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, that is to say, in the enjoyment of every blessing and happiness, and of the most perfect repose; and he entreats him to come and bring him some relief, some alleviation in his torments."

"Unhappy soul! you are now treated yourself as you treated others! You are served now with the same measure which you meted to your neighbour. I was poor, and covered with rags, and you did not clothe me; I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink; I was sick, and you did not visit me; I was loaded with the cross, and with afflictions, and you never helped me to bear them. You must suffer now to be treated as you treated others. You ask for a drop of water, it will be refused you; you will ask for it during all eternity, and during all eternity it will be denied you." What a punishment! always to suffer, never to rest! Always to burn, never any peace! No reconciliation! no term, no end, no hope of end!

4. It is seldom that the sufferings we have on earth are entirely without consolation. We have a friend who sympathises with us in our afflictions;

a father, a wife, a tender mother, whose solicitude renders our sufferings more supportable. But in hell ! complete absence of all help, absolute privation of all consolation ! An eternal horror surrounds the lost, and the inexorable justice of an avenging God weighs for ever upon them ! They hear incessantly that dreadful Voice, repeating to them the words of Abraham to the rich glutton : “ Remember thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things. You were not willing to compassionate his sorrows, when he asked you for the crumbs that fell from your table. He was covered with sores, while you were clothed with purple. He died of hunger at the threshold of your gate, while you feasted sumptuously every day. Would it be just that this poor Lazarus, who suffered all his life with so much patience, should be deprived of the reward of his virtue,—and that you who were insensible to his afflictions, after having indulged in every sensual pleasure while upon earth, should also enjoy a happiness here, which you never thought of meriting, and which is due only to innocence of life ? No, no ; you have each of you reaped what you had sown. Lazarus had sown in tears, it is fitting he should now reap in joy. You chose to spend your days in criminal and earthly pleasures,—you have now commenced your eternity, an eternity of torments in hell.” Listen to the wailings of this unhappy soul ! “ Beautiful Heaven, where I ought to have been, where I might

have enjoyed my God, I shall never see you ! The Lord had destined me to possess you eternally, and, senseless as I was, I would not ! He asked of me my heart, and I refused to give it Him. I preferred my pleasures to His Will ! I have tasted a little honey during my life, and now I am dying every instant in these avenging flames ! What salutary warnings, what holy inspirations, what remorse of conscience, how many opportunities have I had for my sanctification ! Unhappy soul ! I have rejected every grace ; I have lost all, my soul, my eternity, my God !

“ And what was it that I had to do in order to be saved ? Such a very little ! To return sincerely to God, to quit this criminal attachment, to leave that evil company, to bear an injury, to give up an ambitious project, to suffer that sickness with patience ! Alas ;—I had but one word to utter, but one step to take, to be saved ! God was always waiting for me, like a kind Father,—He prevented me with His graces. He was wont to go before me, as it were,—I could say to him with the prodigal son : ‘ I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee,’—that is, in Thy very presence. He would have received me into His arms, and covered me with kisses. But no ! I was not willing. I was spoken to, I was pressed to return to God,—my heart urged me to it,—my conscience entreated me,—but I would not ! Ah ! if I could obtain but a few days,

if I could return to the earth, what penance, what austerities would I not practise !”

5. No,—for the lost in hell, there is no longer an opportunity of doing penance, no possibility of practising austerities,—no forgiveness ! If an angel were to announce to them, that at the end of 100 millions of years, their torments would be ended, hell for them would be no longer hell,—instead of these cries of despair with which it continually resounds, there would be heard only sounds of joy and thanksgiving rising incessantly to Heaven. But no ; for the damned, the height of their misery, that which constitutes hell, is the endless duration of their torments,—“the eternal years,” whose crushing weight falls upon them like mountains. They will be always desiring to die, and death will be always flying far away from them. They will invoke the help of creatures, they will conjure the elements to annihilate them. “Mountains, cover us ! Hills, fall upon us ! Avenging flames, consume us !” Vain desires ! Useless prayers ! They will seek death, and they will never find it. “O death !” exclaims St. Augustine, “how pleasing you would be to those unhappy reprobates, to whom you once appeared so bitter. Those who always held you in horror, now call you to their assistance. ‘Come, O death, put an end to our sufferings,—take from us this miserable existence, destroy, consume, annihilate us !’”

Listen again to the lamentations of the rich man

in hell. He begs Abraham to send Lazarus to the earth, to warn his brothers to change their lives, that so they may not fall, as he had done, into that place of torment. "I beseech You, Father Abraham, let them know that there is indeed a hell, and that I am there horribly tormented. Let them understand that my riches have been my ruin, that my pleasures have made me wretched for ever; and that if they imitate my conduct, an eternal punishment awaits them also. Ah! how happy they are to be able to labour for their salvation, to expiate their sins by penance,—and by means of some light sufferings, and passing mortifications, to ensure for themselves the possession of Heaven! Oh! that I had the time that they are now mis-spending! Oh! that I could return to the earth! Ah! Lord, send them to my brothers, that they may have warning; for, 'if one went to them from the dead,' they would do penance." "No, you are deceived,—they have Moses and the Prophets,—they can listen to the pastors charged to instruct them; and if they do not listen to them, if they do not listen to the doctrine of the true Church, they will not believe even the testimony of one risen from the dead." (St. Luke xvi. 31.)

Astonishing words! which Jesus Christ Himself has uttered! Lesson most worthy of our meditation, and well fitted to humble us. No! though we were to see one of the damned come forth from hell, enveloped in flames,—and were he to give us

the most heart-rending picture of the torments which are suffered there,—if we now refuse to believe the doctrine of the Church, we should then refuse to believe even the testimony of this unhappy reprobate, coming from hell ; and our obstinate incredulity would be the punishment of our pride. Faith in the eternal truths is the most precious gift of Heaven,—and God only grants it to prayer, and to humility of heart. The Jews, the proud Pharisees, had seen Lazarus rise from the dead, at the command of Jesus Christ ; but for all that, they did not believe the more in the Son of God. Let us not say then with the unbelieving : “ Ah ! if I saw some one return to the earth from the other world, I would believe.” Our Lord Himself came from the other world to this earth ; He has instructed us in all that is passing there,—He has worked miracles in confirmation of His words ;—the idolatrous universe has been converted, and has believed His doctrine. Let us also believe, but let us believe with a lively faith ; let us often meditate on the great truths connected with an unhappy eternity, that so the sight of the torments endured in hell may support and animate our patience, in the afflictions we have to suffer upon earth.

6. The history of Citeaux relates that a man of very irregular life, named Fauçon, reclining one night on his soft couch, was unable to sleep. In vain he turned from one side to the other ; in vain he tried to calm his mind, and to banish every

thought that might disturb it. They were useless endeavours, sleep fled far away from him.

The Holy Spirit, desiring to make him attentive to His Voice, knocked at the door of his heart, and shed upon his soul some rays of His divine light. Immediately, Fauçon saw the darkness of his soul disperse,—a bright ray shone upon his understanding; he discovered by that light, truths to which he had hitherto paid no attention. Surprised, astonished, at such a change, he recollected himself, and heard an interior Voice which said to him: “Well, Fauçon, you are on a good bed, on which you are not able to sleep. What would you say, if it were proposed to you to spend two whole years, in the midst of dense darkness, without the power to close your eyes,—without seeing your friends, without any society, or any pleasure? It would be necessary to offer you mountains of gold for you to consent to such a proposal. Yet one day, you must fall sick, and before you expire, you will have to suffer a long and cruel agony, the pains of which will be more acute than those two years passed without sleep. And after your death, what will become of you? Your body will be buried in the earth, there to corrupt and be devoured by worms! And your soul, where will it go? The sins with which you have polluted it, have closed the gate of heaven against you, and you have deserved hell a thousand times. Where will it go then? To hell, without doubt. And what will you find in that

place of horror? A bed of flames, which has been prepared for you, and on which you will be cast,—to lie on it, not for ten, or twenty, or a hundred years, but for an entire eternity.” “An eternity!” cried Fauçon, as if awaking from a deep sleep, and throwing himself from his bed upon the floor, he cried again: “an eternity! No, no;—my God, I will do penance. I renounce the world, and its pleasures, and I devote myself to all the sacrifices You demand of me.”

Fauçon kept his word. He became a Religious in the monastery of Citeaux, where he ended his days, in the practice of all the austerities of the order, and of all its virtues.

IV.

THE THOUGHT OF HEAVEN RENDERS ALL OUR AFFLICTIONS LIGHT.

1. WHEN ancient Greece, in the days of her greatest glory, assembled at Olympia, to assist at the solemn games, it was a sight worthy of admiration to witness the ardour and intrepidity with which the combatants rushed into the arena to merit the suffrages of that imposing assembly. Death with all its horrors had nothing in it to affright those heroes, they braved the most deadly blows, and faced the most imminent dangers.—Alas! what did they expect as the price of their victories? A transitory

honour,—“a frail and corruptible crown,” says the Apostle. And we, children of God, we who have over our heads an entire people contemplating us,—a people of Saints, the people of the Elect of God, we who are awaiting, with the certainty of faith, as the reward of our labours, not a frail wreath of laurels, but an immortal crown, an imperishable throne, an infinite glory—shall we fear to run the career of trials, and to endure some slight sufferings, in order to merit the applause of the celestial Court, and the glory of being crowned by the Hand of God? Ah! let us raise our eyes to-day to this glorious assembly of the Blessed: let us consider the honours bestowed on their virtues, the unspeakable happiness they enjoy, and we shall exclaim, with the Apostle, in the midst of our crosses and tribulations: “No, all the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, which we expect in Heaven.” (Rom. viii. 18.) This glory is so great, so elevated above all human ideas, that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.” (1 Cor. ii. 9.)

What then is the glory, the happiness of Heaven? Can we not form some idea of it, by uniting all that we know upon earth most capable of ravishing the heart of man? All that is most beautiful in the palaces of kings, in the courts of sovereigns, in the triumphs of conquerors? In the magnificence of

their thrones, the majesty and beauty of their crowns, the riches and splendour of their apartments, the sumptuousness of their tables and their banquets ; in a word, all the delights which surround them, and which form the charm of their life ? Adding to these delights, the rich productions of nature, in all that is most sweet and beautiful ; all that is most delicious in fruits, most delightful in perfumes, most gorgeous and brilliant in colouring ; all the most ravishing sounds of music to charm the ear ; all that painting can produce to feast the eye ; all that the natural sciences and human knowledge can offer, capable of filling the mind with light and joy ? Shall we then have, by the union of all the delights known upon earth, —shall we then have some idea of the happiness of Heaven ? No ; because the eye of man hath seen all this, or at least his mind can conceive it ; but the happiness we shall one day enjoy in Heaven, is above, beyond, far out of the reach of all human thought and conception, as the Apostle tells us. Hence it is, as St. Thomas says, that the happiness of Heaven is in a sense infinite, because it is God Whom we shall then see, it is God Whom we shall then love, it is God Whom we shall then possess for ever, according to the full extent of the faculties of our souls.

2. We shall see God in Heaven. O, unspeakable happiness, to see God ! Do you know the avowal which the Evil Spirit made one day to an exorcist,

who commanded him, by the authority of the Church, to say what his thoughts were of the happiness of Heaven? "Ah!" he cried, with a throe of despair, "woe is me that I have lost so great a blessing! If God would but give me a body, and I might hope to see Him but for one instant, I would gladly resolve to mount up from the bottom of hell to the highest part of Heaven, upon a pillar thick-set with thorns, and sharp-pointed swords,—I should be willing, with this body, to encounter these formidable instruments,—and having reached the summit of the pillar, covered with blood, having hardly a spark of life remaining in me, I should think myself well repaid, if I had the happiness of seeing God, but for one single instant." What language!

But in seeing God, what shall we see? and how shall we see Him? First of all, we shall see God in Himself, and such as He is, in His Divine Essence. We shall see the Infinite Source of Life and Beauty,—that immense abyss of sanctity and perfection, that ocean of all good, which is fathomless and without shore. We shall see the infiniteness of His nature, the immensity of His greatness, the eternity of His duration, the eminence and the glory of His majesty. We shall admire the wisdom of His counsels, the depth of His judgments, the strength of His power, the rigour of His justice. We shall contemplate the sweetness of His goodness, the patience of His mercy, the tenderness of

His love, and the conduct of His Providence. We shall see the admirable inventions of His charity to attract us to Himself, and to detach us from creatures. We shall recognise then, what we have so great a difficulty in understanding now, that all the crosses with which He afflicts us in this life, are so many graces, which He contrives for us, in order to lead us to Heaven. We shall see in God, as in a mirror, all the mysteries of religion, all the secrets of nature, the solution of all the difficulties there are in human sciences. We shall see One God in Three Persons ;--the Father, the Creator, who formed us to His divine image ; the Son, the Redeemer, who humbled Himself to take our nature, in order to clothe us with His own ; the Spirit, the Sanctifier, Who has loaded us with His graces here below, to enrich us in Heaven with the treasures of His glory.

This God, so great, so perfect in Himself, we shall behold, shedding the splendour of His Divine attributes on the Holy Humanity of the Saviour. We shall see this glorious Redeemer of the world, sitting at the right hand of the Eternal Father ; this amiable Jesus, the most beautiful of Men ; He Whom the angels and the blessed are never weary of contemplating ; He Whom the Patriarchs and the Prophets desired so earnestly to see ; He Whom all would wish to have seen on earth. "We shall see in Him a ravishing beauty, of which the mind of man cannot form an idea," says St. Teresa ; "a beauty

whose brightness charms the eye without dazzling it ; so fair that it ravishes the senses, and whose mild and heavenly light infinitely surpasses that of the sun." We shall see Him, not hurriedly for a moment, as St. Peter saw Him on Mount Tabor—not in an obscure vision, or in a glimpse of brightness, as St. Teresa saw Him—but in all the glory of His Majesty, and that for ever, and for ever ! Oh ! unspeakable happiness ! We shall contemplate that Divine Face, which gained over souls and moved sinners to repentance ; those eyes whose sweetness captivated the Apostles ; that heart so tender, which compassionated every human infirmity ; we shall kiss those merciful hands which cured the sick and strengthened the weak ; those sacred feet which ran after the sheep that had gone astray, and which were nailed to the Cross for the love of us !

At the side of this King of Glory we shall also see His Divine Mother, the Queen of the Saints, the August Mary, raised on her throne far above all the choirs of Seraphim and Cherubim. We shall see this amiable Virgin, through whom the Saviour came to us, this well-beloved daughter of the Most High, who unites in herself alone, says St. Bernard, more beauties and perfections than all the Angels and all the blessed together.

Lastly, we shall see God in the person of all the Elect ; we shall see Him fill this Eternal Kingdom with the brightness of His Majesty, for there every subject is a king ; this Immortal Palace, of which he

alone is the Architect ; we shall see Him in this brilliant Court, composed of all the Hierarchies of the heavenly intelligences, and the august assemblage of the Saints. We shall see Him establish His peaceful and immovable empire over this triumphant Society of the Blessed gathered from every part of the earth, and out of every age of the world. What a spectacle ! The sight of this immense re-union of the Lord's Elect, all ranged in the most beautiful order, all sitting on thrones, their brows circled with immortal crowns, resplendent with the rays of the Sun of Justice, Who enlightens them with His most pure beams in this magnificent abode. What a ravishing prospect will be the illustrious company of the Patriarchs and Prophets, the glorious college of the Apostles, the victorious army of Martyrs, of Bishops, and of Doctors ; those innumerable legions of the just, and of Confessors, of Virgins, and Penitents, all of them enjoying the most perfect happiness, the most unalterable repose, the sweetest joy, the most complete and assured felicity, since it is none other than the felicity of God Himself ! O Sion ! how brilliant are thy assemblies ! O Israel ! how beautiful are thy tabernacles ! How would it be possible to see so many marvels without being in a perpetual ecstasy of admiration ! How would it be possible to see a God so great, so amiable, without being consumed with love !

3. In Heaven we shall love God. To love is the sweetest act of the soul ; it is the most delicious

sentiment we have, the most imperious inclination of our heart ; it is that which makes the charm of life, and softens all its bitterness. But to love an Object infinitely amiable, infinitely beautiful; to love a God infinitely perfect, the source of all sweetness and of all beauty, to love Him with the very ardour of His own Divine Spirit, with the thrilling unction of His own love ; to love Him, so as to be united to His Divine substance, to be nourished, to be penetrated by it ; to love God, so as not to have any life but that of God, even to the losing of our being in Him, even to our becoming one nature with God ! Conceive what happiness this must be ! To become but one nature with God ! But is this not an imagination ? No ; faith assures us it is a reality. "By whom," saith St. Peter, "He hath given us most great and precious promises, that by those you may be made partakers of the Divine nature." (2 Pet. i. 4.) We shall be partakers of, clothed with, the Divine nature—we shall be raised up even to the Being of God. Then will the words of Holy Scripture be fulfilled : "I have said you are Gods." (Ps. lxxxii. 6.) But what transports, what delight will there be in this ineffable union, in this mingling of our hearts with God !

Here, upon this earth, delivered up to the illusions of the senses, our soul has a very feeble conception of the Divine love ; but when these creature-illusions shall be dispelled, when the day of eternity shall have dawned, restored to the purity of its

natural attractions, to the force and vivacity of that primitive inclination which God has impressed upon it, to love the Sovereign God—then, the soul, immediately it sees the Supreme Beauty, will rush toward it with more impetuosity than the stone precipitates itself towards its centre, with more rapidity than the arrow flies to the mark. Yes, the soul will attach itself to this Infinite Goodness with more eagerness than the famished infant clings to its mother's breast ; it will plunge into this ocean of sweetness with greater abandonment than the fish plunges into its own element ; it will love this Eternal Beauty with greater transports of joy than were ever experienced on earth by friends the most passionately attached.

O happy and blessed life ! Life, all of love ! Then, that immense want we have within us, those infinite desires of joy and happiness we all experience ; that continual and painful thirst for our highest well-being, which no earthly pleasures can quench ; all these cravings of our nature will then be gratified, satisfied to the full ! Ah ! if a single foretaste of these Divine delights could give such consolation to the hearts of the Martyrs as to transport them with joy, even amidst their greatest torments ; if St. Paul, in the midst of his tribulations, could not contain the joy which inundated his soul ; if St. Francis Xavier, overpowered with the labours of his apostleship, could exclaim : “ It is too much, my God, it is too much ; reserve these sweet con-

solutions for eternity ;" if we ourselves have sometimes experienced at the foot of the altar such happy moments, that our hearts seemed to swim in joy and jubilation ; if sometimes, after a fervent communion, or after the sincere confession of our sins, we have exclaimed with David, "One day in the House of the Lord is better than a thousand years spent in the pleasures of the world," what shall we say in Heaven, where we shall enjoy the most perfect happiness, not for a day, but for all eternity ? What shall we say, when we shall see ourselves inebriated, not with one little drop, but with a torrent of pleasures ; when we shall enter into the joy of the Lord as into an ocean of delights, to swim in it, to plunge at will into its waves of bliss, to be lost in the Divine love !

4. Lastly, in Heaven we shall possess God. Upon earth, one of our strongest and most active passions is the desire of possessing great wealth. Man, it seems, wishes, by increasing and multiplying his domains and his property, to magnify, and, as it were, multiply himself. He crosses the sea to amass a little gold ; he would go to the end of the world to acquire a piece of land. Strange illusion !

His heart remains as narrow as the bit of land he has acquired ; and by its possession he only becomes more insatiable. Ah ! it is not so with the possession of God ! The possession of God will enrich and enlarge our being with all the greatness of the Being of God ; it will enrich us with all His trea-

tures, and will communicate to us all His Divine perfections. The possession of God ! The assured recompense of the just, of those who suffer, and who are resigned in their afflictions. It is the Lord Himself who tells us so. "I will be thy reward exceeding great." (Gen. xv. 1.) I will be your reward, reward exceeding great ; for it does not differ from that which He has accorded to His own well-beloved Son. In order, then, to form an idea of this reward, let us raise our eyes even to the throne of this King of Heaven ; let us contemplate the splendours, the beauty, the magnificence of the Son of God ; let us see the repose, the peace, the eternal happiness of His holy humanity ; for it is thus that God will reward all His Elect, it is thus that He will honour us. Yes, us who are now so afflicted, so miserable, who "groan being burdened," who groan under the burden of pain, of poverty, of misfortune—the suffering and abandoned members of the Son of God. Ah ! one day we shall be no longer in suffering and abandonment : we shall share in the felicity, in the riches, and the glory of God made man. And by what title ? In quality of the members, the brethren, the co-heirs of Jesus Christ. "For, we are the members of Jesus Christ," says the Apostle ; we all together constitute His Body ; we are now dead in Him, we die every day with Him by our sufferings, and by the sacrifice we make to Him of our life. We shall rise again, then, in Him, and with Him, because the

glory of the Head redounds to the members, even as the life of the Head animates all parts of the body.

"I have overcome the world," saith our Saviour Himself; "I have triumphed, by patience, over all the efforts of hell. I have drunk, during life, of the torrent of sufferings and reproaches; hence it is that My Father has exalted My Name above every name; He has made Me sit at His right hand as a conqueror. But I wish that they also who conquer in My Name should sit with Me on My throne; that is, that they should be associated with Me in My glory, in My happiness; that they should enjoy all My goods, all My possessions; since it is for them that I have acquired them, at the price of My own blood." "He that overcometh I will give to sit on My throne." (Apoc. iii. 21.) "O Holy Father, I recommend to You My Elect, I recommend to You these afflicted souls, these My poor, sick, and suffering members, who on earth sow only in tears. I recommend them to You, O Father; You have given them to Me; they are Mine. I have sacrificed Myself for them, and I desire that where I am, they may be also with Me. Grant that they may be always in Me, incorporated in Me, so that You may treat them as Myself;" and, "as I am in You, and am but One with You, grant that they also may be in Us, and may be one with Us." (St. John xvii. 22.)

Conceive now, imagine the greatness of the

reward that awaits us in heaven ! To be one in Jesus Christ ! to make but one with Him ; to share with Him the infinite love of His Heavenly Father ! to be, as Jesus Christ is, the object of God the Father's eternal delight and affection, and to share with Jesus Christ in all His treasures ! to be clothed with His power ! adorned with His sanctity ! enlightened with His wisdom ! filled with His charity ! crowned with His glory ! happy with His felicity ! In a word, to possess God in Jesus Christ, with and by Jesus Christ ; to possess Him by the Spirit of Jesus Christ ; to possess Him as our property, our domain, our heritage ; as the price of our labours, the palm of our victories ! to possess Him without interruption, without fear of losing Him, without any limit, during all eternity, as long as God shall be God ! What an excess of dignity ! What a height and fulness of happiness !

5. At the prospect of such perfect happiness shall we not exclaim with the Royal Prophet : " When shall I come and appear before the face of God ? " (Psalm xli. 3.) When shall I enjoy the sweetness of Thy Divine Presence ? When shall I see Thee, and love Thee, and possess Thee ? When wilt Thou take me from this valley of tears, that I may go and dwell in my own country ? Must I yet live still longer in a world so full of miseries ? In Thy bosom there will be no more sighing, nor lamentation, nor shedding of tears ! In Heaven there is no sickness, nor trouble, nor humiliation,

nor poverty ; no need of guarding against heat or cold, or hunger or thirst. The day and the spring-time are eternal in that delicious country ; no object there to shock the eye or offend the ear ; there the odours are all sweet, the air exhales for ever a delicious perfume ; no remembrance of the past, no fear for the future, will trouble our joy ; no want, no desire ever impairs the profound peace of the soul ; there the passions are all extinct, every vice is for ever rooted out, every error dispelled. The virtues shine there in all their lustre, and Divine charity inflames every heart !

O Sion, how happy are your inhabitants ! There all the miseries of this life are gloriously recompensed ; the poor are loaded with riches, the sick are radiant with health, the humble are crowned with glory ; the penitent are there inebriated with delights ; the afflicted transported with joy ; the ignorant filled with knowledge ; the unhappy beings whom we have seen traversing the desert of this life, weeping and sighing, in Heaven will be immersed in perpetual torrents of sweetness and pleasure. O Life of Heaven ! O Blessed Life ! Life all of love and enjoyment ! What charms in being always in the society of the Saints, among whom the most exalted in merit will be the most modest and amiable. What delight it will be to enjoy the company of the Angels ! to converse familiarly with God's Elect, with those great Saints who have astonished the world by their virtues ;

to be joined in the sweetest and strictest friendship, with those pure and angelic hearts, those noble and elevated spirits, whose conversation on earth had so many attractions, and was so esteemed and honoured. What felicity again to see our parents, friends, and benefactors, and to celebrate with them through all eternity, with canticles of joy and triumph, the glory of the thrice Holy God, in the union of one and the same spirit, of one and the same heart, of one and the same sentiment of love and of gratitude !

Such is the felicity that awaits us in Heaven ; such is the happiness promised to our patient resignation in afflictions. Happiness promised, do I say ? Nay, happiness accorded, given even in this life, in the marvellous gift of suffering. "For," saith the Apostle, "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. iv. 17.) You see that St. Paul does not say will work, but worketh, that is, now, actually, as the cause produces its effect, as the tree produces its fruit. "Yes," exclaims St. Bernard, "the glory of Heaven is hidden in tribulation, as the flower is concealed in the seed ;" we possess an eternity of happiness in a moment of suffering, torrents of pleasure in a few light afflictions.

This is what our Lord has taught us Himself in the Gospel. This Divine Saviour, wishing to console His dear disciples for all the persecutions they

would have to suffer in the world, compares the state of affliction and tribulation in which they would find themselves, to that of a mother in the pains of child-birth. "A woman when she is in labour hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." (St. John xvi. 21.) The happy mother now feels a delicious joy; she dries up her tears, and thinks only of enjoying her happiness, and of embracing her dear son, forgetting all in the sweetness of her affection. "Thus it shall be with you," adds our Lord, "in all your pains, and all your sadness; a little while and they will all have passed away; but the joy you shall experience shall not pass away; it shall be eternal, and no one shall be able to take it from you."

Let us conclude this reading by a quotation from Tertullian on this subject. In the book which he composed for the consolation of the martyrs, Tertullian relates a singular custom, which was still kept up, in his own time, among the Lacedæmonians. The legislators of those proud Spartans, in order to train their countrymen to a hard and laborious life, and to render them capable of enduring the severest trials of labour and pain, had appointed for the young men certain bodily exercises, which were extremely violent and painful. One of the most remarkable was the following: The children of the first nobility were assembled in one of the

temples, in the presence of their parents and friends. Before the altars were exposed a number of prizes, of little value in themselves, but to which public opinion attached the greatest importance. They were destined for the children of the greatest courage; that is to say, for the boys who endured with the greatest firmness and impassibility, a cruel and bloody flagellation. It was a horrible spectacle, but yet one worthy of admiration, to see those young children all covered with wounds, and bathed in blood, manifesting their joy under the stripes of this cruel scourging. The parents, tranquil spectators of this barbarous ceremony, applauded their intrepidity; far from manifesting compassion, they exhorted them rather to die than to complain; for in their eyes the greatest glory of their children, was for them to lose their lives, rather than to lose their courage and yield to pain. "What a lesson for us!" exclaims Tertullian, addressing himself to the Martyrs, and to all the afflicted in their persons, "what a lesson for Christians! For, if the desire of a passing and imaginary glory inspired those Pagan children with such great courage, what effect ought not the desire of an eternal glory and happiness to produce in Christians! And if such delicate limbs were voluntarily offered to the scourge, in order to acquire some reputation for courage, shall a Christian, with Heaven in view, and the prospect of the rewards our Lord has destined for him, fear to endure some

slight sufferings, to ensure for himself the possession of that felicity without end ? If the clay of worldly honours is so highly prized, how much more should we esteem the precious gold of heavenly glory ? You say you are in chains, you see before you the horrors of death, you experience the worst treatment, you are deprived of food, abandoned by your friends, separated from your relations, a thousand interior troubles are added to all these outward afflictions. Alas ! children of sorrow, I conjure you by the mercy and love of Jesus Christ, do not be at all discouraged ; raise your eyes to Heaven, you will see your Divine Saviour awaiting you there, to make you partakers of His glory. St. Stephen saw Jesus at the moment when he was stoned, and after that vision he felt no pain, he regarded his murderers as angels who were crowning him, and the stones which they hurled at him, as so many precious pearls encircling his head as with a diadem. Ah ! look up to Heaven, and you will no longer be sensible of your afflictions. See the immortal throne on which you will there repose, the unspeakable happiness you will then enjoy, the crown of glory promised to your patience, the torrents of delight with which you will be inebriated for ever, and at this sight your soul will bid adieu to the earth, it will burn with a longing desire to burst its bonds, and to take its flight to this eternal beatitude.

V.

OF THE PATIENCE OF JESUS.

1. I COME now to the last and most powerful motive which religion furnishes, to inspire you with patience in your afflictions; it is the consideration of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. The bleeding wounds of this Divine Saviour are so many fountains of grace, giving to the soul life and strength, consolation and encouragement.

“The wounds of Jesus,” says St. Bernard, “are so many holy tongues instructing us how to suffer, and exhorting us to patience. Thus the Son of God seems to have desired to be raised on the Cross, and exposed on a high mountain, only that He might be seen by all the afflicted; that so the spectacle of His sufferings might be for them, what the brazen serpent was formerly to the Israelites, a perfect remedy for the cure of their wounds, and for the alleviation of their sufferings.”

Let us, then, go to Jesus; let us go to the foot of the Cross; it is He Himself who invites us: “Come,” He says, “come, all ye that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.” (St. Matt. xi. 28.) “I will show you sufferings so great, tribulations so extreme, that you will no longer dare to complain of your afflictions. Look upon Me on the Cross, lifted up between heaven and earth; see My

most revolting ill-treatment and injustice, the most shameful outrages, the blackest calumnies, and He does not say one word in reply. He is accused without proof ; He is condemned without reason ; He is struck without check ; the priests blaspheme Him through envy ; the Pharisees curse Him through hatred ; strangers despise Him from caprice ; the people, the children, the ancients, all are permitted to ill-treat Him, contrary to all law ; and Jesus utters not a single complaint. Even those who ought to have shown him both attachment and fidelity, seem to have conspired against Him to augment His sufferings ; the Disciples abandon Him, Judas betrays Him, Peter denies Him ; the poor whom He had fed scorn His power ; the ignorant whom He had instructed treat His wisdom as folly ; the miserable whom He had consoled raise their voice to mock at His goodness and His love ; and Jesus, plunged in this sea of bitterness, lost under this cloud of outrages and blasphemies, does not utter a single murmur—He does not open His mouth, either to complain or lament ; much more than this, He does not permit Himself to turn aside His head from the blows which He receives.

3. St. Paul, in speaking of the Incarnation of the Son of God, uses these remarkable words : “He annihilated Himself, even to take the form of a servant.” (Philip. ii. 7.) And the Saviour Himself, by the mouth of the Royal Prophet, goes so far

as to compare Himself to a worm—"But I am a worm, and no man"—(Ps. xxi. 7)—to give us an idea of the extreme abjection to which He reduced Himself. "But a worm," exclaims a pious and holy Bishop, "when trodden under foot makes an effort to withdraw itself, but Jesus Christ remains immovable;" He will not ward off a blow, even by the least movement, but He gives Himself to it. He delivers Himself up to all those who seek to ill-treat Him; "He gave Himself to those who judged Him unjustly;" He gave Himself to them to suffer all that they may choose. They wish in their mocking to kiss Him, He offers His lips; they wish to bind Him, He offers them His hands; they wish to buffet Him, He offers His cheeks; they would scourge Him cruelly, He presents His shoulders; He is accused before Caiphas and Pilate, He demeans Himself as if convicted; Herod and all his court mock Him, they send Him back to Pilate as a fool, and He acknowledges it by His silence; He is abandoned to servants, to soldiers, and He delivers Himself into their hands. See Him in prison; behold the Holy of Holies in a dungeon, at the mercy of vile slaves, who make Him their sport during the night; they tear His hair, they pluck His beard, they bruise and mangle Him with blows—and He says not one word. He gives his cheeks to the insults of rough, rude, and ignorant men. See His adorable face, the delight of heaven, the charm of holy souls, so full of

grace, of goodness, and of beauty—see it covered with spittle ! O patience of Jesus ! O eloquent silence ! What beautiful lessons You teach us !

Come, all you that suffer—come, all you that are poor and afflicted—come and be instructed at your Saviour's side—come and learn of this good Master to suffer in silence and with meekness. Come all—and you who complain so bitterly of your sufferings, who are so sensitive to the least contradiction, so difficult to be pleased even by those who serve you—and you who think yourselves at liberty to speak to all the world of your afflictions, provided, you say, that no prejudice results therefrom to your neighbour ; come, and Jesus will tell you that when you thus speak to every one of your afflictions, you lose the fruit of patience, and what is most sweet and precious in it. I mean the *secret* of what you suffer as known only to God and your own soul. Jesus will tell you that in seeking consolation out of Himself, your merit is lessened by one half, and that you expose yourself to vanity, by receiving praise and commendation for your imperfect resignation. If you wish for some alleviation of your sufferings, seek it in God, after the example of Jesus ; you will find in Him a Father full of mercy, the God of all consolation ; for the Lord is the joy of the afflicted, the strength of the weak, the health of the sick, the Father of the orphan, the resource and the life of all who are in trouble.

4. But if it is a great virtue not to utter the least complaint in the midst of the most acute sufferings, of the most bitter vexations, of the most crying injustice—it is a virtue still more rare, under so many indignities, not to show by the countenance any sign of impatience indicating the irritation of the heart. Oh, how difficult it is, even to well-trained virtue, to see yourself the victim of ingratitude, of injustice, and of barbarity, not to manifest exteriorly some movement of vexation, some vivacity which announces, I will not say a cherished desire of vengeance or anger in the heart, but at least some sadness, some trouble, which desolates and depresses it?

Yet, if you consider our Divine Lord Jesus throughout His Passion, you will never discover in Him any of these movements. Follow Him in that path of blood and tribulation, along which He went from Mount Olivet to Calvary; observe His countenance, read its lines, examine all He does—you will see, without doubt, the expression of pain and sorrow imprinted in a marked manner on His Divine Person; but you will never notice any sign of anger or of ill-temper, never any indication of pride or impatience, and not even the shadow of discontent. He is ever a Lamb full of meekness, everywhere and always a sweet serenity reigns on His brow, and an amiable resignation and the most profound calm and peace appear in all His exterior. Yet what reasons had He for showing a just indig-

nation ! All laws were violated in His regard ; no sort of justice, or of humanity, or of decency were observed towards the innocent Jesus. He is arrested like a robber ; His hands are bound as a criminal ; He is dragged along like an animal driven by blows and violence to the slaughter-house. The Saviour is faint from the loss of blood ; His strength is still more exhausted by the violence and the haste with which He is forced along ; He falls from weakness, and He is assailed by a storm of blows to urge Him to rise ; He offers no resistance ; nevertheless, all the way, from the Garden of Olives to Jerusalem, this innocent victim is deluged with blasphemies and outrages.

Let us follow this Divine Saviour, before the tribunal of the high-priest, and of the Roman governor, and we shall see Him subjected to the most crying injustice, to the most cruel ignominies, and He offers a still more admirable example of meekness and patience. He appears before the high-priest Annas ; the Holy of Holies is, in the presence of vile sinners, loaded with fetters, and cord round His neck, and covered with all the shame of a culprit. These unworthy priests have gathered round them all their partisans, declared enemies of the Saviour ; they are the Scribes, the Pharisees, the doctors of the law—men full of hatred, of envy, and thirsting for the blood of the Just One. At the bottom of their hearts they are full of triumphant joy to see at last at their feet Him Whose

exemplary life had been a perpetual condemnation of their own hypocritical conduct. They rejoice to behold Him in their hands, confused, humbled, abandoned by His own friends, betrayed by one of His Disciples, and despised by the people. They take advantage of this state of weakness and abjection to insult Him, to laugh at His miracles, and to assail Him with bitter mockery.

Annas addresses Him with arrogance, questions Him with disdain, and summons Him brutally to set forth his doctrine ; and after the reply, full of dignity, which Jesus made him, an insolent servant, in order to ingratiate himself with his master, dares to give Him a blow. A blow ! from the hands of a vile slave ! A blow before a numerous assembly ! A blow on the cheek of the Saviour God ! on that adorable Face, which gives joy to the Angels and the Blessed ! O Heavenly Powers ! why do you not come to punish such an enormity ? But no ; •Jesus- has already pardoned the crime and the criminal ; and an affront so cruel, an outrage so painful and so humiliating, has not disturbed the tranquillity of His soul. Admire His meekness, His resignation ! It is true that His air is neither smiling nor triumphant. He does not seek through vanity to raise Himself above his afflictions ; but His look is humble and modest, as of one suffering from love, and of one who, in His greatest pains, is more moved by the sad state of His enemies than by His own afflictions. Neither is His a cold in-

sensibility, a stoical impassibility, which hardens itself against misfortunes, and, through pride, wishes to appear unconquered by them ; no, the suffering of Jesus is a suffering profoundly felt, and so much the more so, as in this Man-God, the complexion of the body, the penetration of the judgment, and the sensibility of the heart, were more perfect than in other men. Hence He felt the more keenly, the more intensely, all that was ignominious and cruel in the ill-treatment He received. But in spite of all this sensitiveness to suffering, Jesus manifested in His conduct only meekness, affability, and resignation. "He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah," saith the Prophet. He could, with a single sign, crush all His enemies, but He restrains and holds in check His infinite Power, and in the midst of the ravening wolves He shows the calmness and the meekness of a lamb. Let us hear how kindly He replies to the impudent servant who had outraged Him so infamously : "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil ; but if well, why strikest thou Me?" (St. John xviii. 23.) O meekness ! O unexampled patience ! O my Saviour, how great is Your forbearance towards these cruel persecutors ! They treat You with barbarous ferocity, and You do not manifest any vexation, any aversion. They heap upon You injury, blasphemy, and contempt, and You have only feelings of compassion for them ! O Divine Pastor of souls ! You show clearly what fire it is that consumes Your Heart ; it is not, no,

certainly it is not, the fire of vengeance, but that of infinite charity for the salvation of sinners, and this charity extends even to Your murderers, who have vowed to take away Your life.

You have far stronger desires for their salvation than they have for Your death. Yes, such was the patience of Jesus Christ. He prayed for His enemies, He suffered, He died for them, in order to deliver them from eternal punishment. This is our last reflection, which we shall now develop.

5. Hitherto we have seen how the patience of Jesus Christ manifested itself outwardly, by His silence, and the serenity of His countenance. Let us now consider that patience in its principle, in the interior of His soul. It is there that we shall see this virtue reign over the heart of the Son of God, according to the thought of Tertullian, "like a king on his throne." We shall admire three marvellous effects it produces in the conduct of Jesus towards His persecutors. The first was, to excuse them ; the second, to compassionate them ; the third, was to pray and suffer for their salvation.

It needed a God of charity, it needed a heart as indulgent as that of Jesus Christ, to be able to find any excuse for the villany of the Jews, to palliate crimes so evident and of such enormity ; to cover, with a veil of charity, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the black ingratitude of the people, the revolting untruthfulness and duplicity of the false witnesses, the cowardly injustice of Pilate, and the ferocious

cruelty of the executioners. Yet the Saviour, overwhelmed as He was with the blows of these barbarians, finds in His charity a means of excusing their excesses. He does them, in a manner, justice; He admits that there was more of ignorance in them than of malice; He appears to see only inconsiderateness and fickleness in their conduct; it is enough to lessen the enormity of their crime in His sight. Doubtless He was not ignorant that their criminal passions had much to do with the sufferings they inflicted on Him,—but His meekness is so great, that He only loves to see in them what may be their excuse. He shuts His eyes to their perversity of heart; He forgets, He feigns even not to know, the real grounds of their guiltiness. He ascribes their disorders to the blindness which their passions had brought upon them. He wishes to persuade Himself, in a manner, that they do not know what they do. He tries to persuade His Father so, too. He undertakes their defence with His Father. He forgets His own sufferings, in deploring their fatal blindness; and touched with real compassion for them, He sheds tears over the miseries and misfortunes which threaten both themselves and their ungrateful country. O model of patience and of meekness! O charity of Jesus! O tenderness of the sweetest, most humble, and most loving of hearts! When, O my God, shall we imitate You a little in our afflictions? When will it be that, amidst the troubles, the difficulties, the contradic-

tions that we have daily to suffer, we shall manifest something of that sweetness, and that patience, which made You so amiable, even under the blows of Your executioners? Alas, Lord, we often follow a course of conduct entirely different from Your own! Instead of excusing the faults of our neighbour, we are disposed to exaggerate them; in place of compassionating his frailty, we rise up against him; we often suppose there is malice, when there is only thoughtlessness; we see bad intentions, when there is perhaps the desire to oblige us; all want of respect vexes us, a refusal irritates us; a service rendered with a bad grace, excites our complaints and murmurs. O my God, how many weaknesses there are in my poor heart! How far am I removed from You! Give me, O Jesus, O Life of my soul, give me a heart patient like Yours! Grant me, for the edification of those who are around me, that meekness, that true charity which You showed towards Your enemies. Do more, O Lord, kindle in my soul an ardent zeal for Your glory, so that, forgetting my own sufferings, I may pray and suffer after Your example, for the salvation of my brethren; for it is to that extent, O my God, that You carried Your patience and charity.

Yes, the Divine Saviour did not content Himself with excusing the excesses of His persecutors, with forgetting His own troubles, in order to compassionate those with which He sees them menaced; His tender love goes farther, He prays for them, He

suffers for them, He asks His Heavenly Father to forgive their crimes: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Innocent victim! These barbarians put Him to the most cruel tortures, and He feels for them nothing but love and tenderness! Divine Lamb! He receives nothing but outrages and maledictions, and His heart demands for these ungrateful wretches the graces and benedictions of Heaven! From His Cross, He offers up His prayers for their happiness; He wishes them, He gives them life and salvation,—while they condemn Him to death, and to the most cruel of deaths! O triumph of the love and patience of Jesus! Perhaps some one might be found with courage enough to die for a friend, or a benefactor,—perhaps, saith St. Paul, "for a good man, some one would dare to die" (Rom. v. 7); but to die for one's enemies, and by the hand of one's enemies,—to put oneself in the place of the guilty, and to become the victim of their cruelty, to suffer oneself the punishment of their crime, while we see that this punishment is only the effect of their malice,—this is a charity of which God alone can furnish us an example.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING.

PRAYER TO JESUS SUFFERING.

O JESUS! O the Life of my soul, and the model of my patience! how is it that You are so cruel to

Yourself, and so merciful towards ungrateful sinners? Why are You so gentle, so charitable, so indulgent in their regard, and towards Yourself so rigorous and so severe? Whilst Your enemies mangle Your virginal body in the scourging, whilst they nail You to the cross, and make You endure the most cruel and agonizing torments, You are praying for them, O infinite goodness! in a most touching and affectionate manner! The moans which escape from Your sacred breast, through the agony of pain, ascend to the throne of Your Father in Heaven, and demand forgiveness for Your ungrateful enemies. They are thirsting for Your Blood, and You thirst for their happiness; You receive their blows, their injuries, with thankfulness,—and You offer Yourself to Your Heavenly Father, as the price of their salvation, and the ransom of the human family! O love Divine! O unspeakable charity of the Heart! Jesus, how far am I from imitating You! You suffer from love of Your enemies, whilst they are ill-treating You; and I, unworthy sinner as I am, who ought to take Your place, and suffer all that You endure, I can dare to complain when You chastise me in Your mercy! I dare to murmur against Your dispensations of love and wisdom! And yet, O my God, all the stripes with which You chastise me, come from the hand of a Father,—they are proportioned to my weakness; You accompany them with Your grace, in order that I may suffer with merit; and the tender-

ness of Your heart makes You compassionate us in the afflictions which You send us. How am I then myself to be pitied, when I complain of You, and when I do not receive with faith and love the sufferings which befall me ! But in this I am much more to blame, that finding nothing difficult when I wish to satisfy my irregular desires,—the least sufferings seem to me to be insupportable, when I am to bear them for You. Change, O my Saviour, by virtue of Your patience, such unworthy dispositions : by the fire of Your love, convert the weakness and false sensitiveness of my soul. Turn towards me, O Divine Jesus, the beauty of Your face ; make me see that sweet serenity which shone forth from Your countenance in the midst of Your greatest torments,—that humble resignation which accompanied You wherever You went,—that unaltered calm, that longanimity, which Your enemies themselves admired ; so that the powerful attractions of Your Divine looks may impart to my soul the strength to imitate You. Grant me, O my God, the grace never to lose sight of You ! For, if the eyes of my soul are always fixed on You, I shall find in this loving contemplation a celestial food, and a remedy in all my afflictions. You are, O Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life ; in looking on You, all that is dead within me will revive. It is through you, O Eternal Mercy, that I shall be delivered from all my miseries. It is in You, O my Sovereign Felicity, that I shall be consoled in the

troubles we meet with in this valley of tears. It is from You, O Fountain of Sweetness, that I shall obtain the graces of patience and resignation to persevere in Your holy service. O love of Jesus ! always burning, and yet never consumed ! Come and inflame my heart, and kindle therein the fire of Your love.

You, O Lord, who have carried submission to Your enemies so far as never to refuse anything to their criminal inclinations, how can You fail to listen to the holy desires of my soul, when I ask the grace to love You and to imitate You when tried by tribulation ? O Treasure of eternal blessings ! O Jesus ! Since You gave Yourself so liberally to Your enemies, give Yourself to me, who am an enemy of Your glory, that I may become the faithful friend of Your heart. And since the sight of those about to perish caused You so much grief, do not suffer me to be lost, O my Saviour ! Your affliction is great enough without being increased by my destruction. Open my ears, that I may hear Your voice ; open my eyes, that I may see Your example ; open my lips, that I may sing Your mercies ; soften my heart, that it may become alive to Your sufferings, and that I may fear whatever may renew them. Grant, O Lord, that to whatever distress or anguish I may be reduced, I may remain ever united to You, and to Your most holy humanity, so suffering and so resigned,—in order that I may find in this union the strength and the patience necessary to

surmount every trial, and to persevere in Your love.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

O MARY, the most faithful companion of the sufferings of Jesus, the witness of His sorrows, and of all His virtues, obtain for me the grace to imitate Him in my afflictions. You are the health of the weak,—save me from the infirmities of my body and of my soul. You are the consolation of the afflicted, console a child who loves you, and implores your aid. You are the refuge of sinners, receive me, O tender Mary! into your maternal arms. Pray for me to your Divine Son; demand of Him, for me, the pardon of my sins; clothe me with His spirit; arm me with His patience; obtain for me His meekness; kindle in me His charity,—so that I may live, that I may suffer, that I may die, in His grace, and for His love.

St. Joseph, powerful protector of the dying, come to my assistance in my last agony. Amen.

PART THE FOURTH.

ON CONFIDENCE IN GOD IN AFFLICTIONS.

I.

EXCELLENCE OF THIS VIRTUE.

1. CONFIDENCE in God is especially the virtue of the sick and the afflicted ; it is this virtue which consoles them in their trials, tranquillises them in their fears, banishes sadness from their hearts, and alleviates all their sufferings. “ It is a fountain of joy,” saith the Royal Prophet, “ which fills them with an unspeakable sweetness ; a river of peace, where they can quench their thirst, when the soul is dry ; a rampart of safety, which defends them from all their enemies.” What a treasure is this Divine confidence ! It renders us masters of the heart of God, and of all the riches of His goodness ; it enables us to find in Him an ocean of graces, and an effectual remedy in every trial. St. Paul calls it the anchor of our salvation. O beautiful ! O consoling expression ! If you are assailed by

trials ; if the waters of tribulation surround you ; if your poor soul is submerged in the waves of sadness, of fear, and of anguish, which alternately agitate and distress it ; if you think you are about to perish, let down this anchor of confidence, and you will be saved. You will then be calm and unmoved in the midst of the tempest ; “for they who hope in the Lord,” saith the Royal Prophet, “shall be as immovable as Mount Sion.” (Ps. cxxiv. 1.) “Confidence in God,” says a holy Religious, “is a harbour of safety, where we are sheltered from all storms of temptation ; it is a buckler which protects us from all dangers ; it is a tree of life, to preserve our strength and to prevent us from languishing in vexation and sadness ; it is that happy tent, that grateful shade, wherein God promises to place his children, to shelter them from the summer’s heat and the winter’s cold. If the goodness of God is an inexhaustible fountain, from which streams of grace and benediction are constantly flowing, confidence is the basin or reservoir destined to receive them.” Such is the thought of St. Cyprian. This virtue, according to St. Bernard, is like a conqueror ; it gains the victory in all that it wishes or demands. It is to holy confidence that God made this promise, when speaking to His people : “I will deliver to you every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon ; all the possessions you hope for shall be yours.” (Joshua i. 3.)

It would take me too long to relate all the commendations which the Holy Scriptures and the holy Fathers have pronounced upon the virtue of confidence. There is no virtue of which they speak with more pleasure and admiration ; there is not one to which God attaches more favours, and which He invites us more earnestly to practise ; not one which has more powerful motives and attractions to gain the heart ; not one which is more necessary to our poor frail nature, and to the suffering condition of the afflicted. "To wish to live without confidence," says St. Louis of Grenada, "is to wish to live without God ; and to live without God is to live as a reprobate, deprived of all succour, of every blessing, and exposed to every evil.

2. Into what extreme poverty, into what an abyss of misery are they plunged who suffer and have no confidence in God ! Troubles and vexations crowd upon them on all sides ; the past offers to their view nothing but bitterness, the present nothing but suffering, and the future is fraught with despair ! A frightful night envelopes such souls ; gloomy thoughts and phantoms, inspired by the tempter, traverse them at every moment, like lightning flashes, which seize upon them and keep them in continual fear and agitation, greatly endangering even the health of the body. But cause one ray of hope to shine upon the poor soul, and immediately you will see it restored to calm ; the

darkness will disperse, joy and serenity will reappear upon the brow, and there will be once more peace and happiness.

Do not imagine that the hope of human aid can take the place of this confidence in God. "Cursed be the man," said the Holy Spirit, "who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." (Jerem. xvii. 5.) To hope in man is to lean upon a frail reed, which will break and wound the hand that leans upon it. Ah ! what can the mighty, the rich, the learned of this world do to lighten your affliction ? Are there not trials that do not admit of any human consolation ? Are there not sorrows beyond all human remedy ? Are there not sufferings that God alone, and the unction of His grace, can alleviate ? Follow, then, the wise counsel of David, "Do not confide in the princes of the earth ;" they cannot save your soul. Cast yourself, as a child, into the arms of God. He is a Father who loves you, and who loves you more than all the fathers in the world. He is always with you in tribulation ; invoke Him, and He will come to your aid. A single word that He will say to your heart, will make you stronger, and will fill you with more joy than all the help and consolation that man can offer you.

Say to our Lord, with humility and confidence, what the sisters of Lazarus said to Him, when they invited Him to come and see their brother, "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick ; but come, and he will be cured." (St. Luke xi. 3.) The Lord

will come, do not doubt it ; you will hear His voice within you, "Here I am, My son ; I come to you because you called Me." These few words from "The Following of Christ," completed the conversion of La Harpe. Although this famous writer had for a long time adopted what is termed philosophical opinions, and though he had been an active partisan of the Revolution, he had candour enough to reproach the monsters of the Revolution for their horrible crimes. He did not fear to say openly that Robespierre, who aspired to the glory of being both an orator and a writer, was a man utterly devoid of capacity. This language was reported ; and the death of La Harpe was decided upon. He was cast into prison. There, this famous philosopher, abandoned, deprived of all help, even of his books, fell into a deep melancholy. A pious person endeavoured to console him, and gave him the only book he had left ; it was the Bible. "I did not become a veteran in the philosophy of the age," thought La Harpe, "to read the Bible." However, for want of other occupation, he takes the Bible, opens it, and the first words he reads astonish him, and the words which follow them fill him with confusion ; and reading on, he exclaimed with admiration, "How is it that I did not know this book before ? It is a master-piece ! Never could the mind of man have conceived and expressed such truths ! Yes, this book must be Divine." . . . La Harpe is almost converted.

Yet the ray of light was still very weak. La Harpe had been especially touched with the poetic beauties of the Bible. Some books of devotion were now put into his hands. He devoured them. But however disposed he was to return sincerely to the principles of the Faith, he doubted if all his crimes could be blotted out, and that God would pardon him all his past sins. His state of mind was a very painful one. It is thus he describes it himself: "I was," he says, "in my little cell, alone, and extremely sad. I had read the Psalms, the Gospels, and some good books. Though gradual, their effect had been rapid; I had already returned to the Faith; I saw a light, which came from nature; but it frightened me, and made me shudder, by showing me an abyss—namely, forty years of wandering away from the truth. I saw all the evil, but I saw no remedy; no one around me to offer me the helps of religion; on the one hand the light of heavenly truth showed me my past life as it really was, on the other hand was death, the death I expected daily, death on the scaffold." No longer was the priest seen there to console him who was about to die upon it; the priest only mounted the scaffold to die upon it himself. "Full of these sad thoughts, my heart was cast down, and silently addressed itself to God, whom I had so lately found again, and whom I hardly yet began to know. I said to Him, 'What must I do? what is to become of me?' I had upon the table 'The

Following of Christ ;' and I had been told that in this excellent book I should often find an answer to my thoughts. I opened it at hazard, and on doing so my eye fell on these words, 'Here I am, My son ; I come to you because you called Me.' (Book III. ch. xv.) I read no more. The sudden impression I received from these words it is impossible to describe, and it is as impossible to forget as to describe it. I prostrated myself on the ground, bathed in tears, almost choked with sobs, and uttering broken words. I felt my heart relieved and enlarged, but at the same time almost ready to break. A crowd of ideas kept rushing through my mind ; I wept for a long time ; but I have no other remembrance of what then passed, except that my heart had never experienced any emotion so violent and yet so delightful ; and that these words, 'Here I am, My son,' never ceased to ring in my ears, and penetrate every faculty of my soul."

Yes ! the sweetness of these words will open your heart to joy ; and, were it filled with sadness, it would flood it with a torrent of consolations. You will say then with David, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord ;" and with St. Paul, "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation" (2 Cor. vii. 4) ; and you may apply to yourself the words of the Royal Prophet, when speaking of the just man, "He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season." And again, "The Lord is my

life, my hope, my strength, and my salvation." He covereth me with His wings, He preserves me, and He loves me as the apple of His eye. He has hidden me in His innermost heart. What have I to fear, when the Lord protects me? Why should I fear the persecutions of the wicked, or the reverses of fortune? Is not God with me? Is He not my support, my defence, my buckler, and my fortress? If God, then, be with me, who can be against me? No, no, my Lord and my God; "Though armies in camp should stand together against me; when I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death; I will fear no evil, for Thou art always with me."

3. Such is the language with which confidence in God will inspire you, as it did the Royal Prophet. But you will say, perhaps, "David was not afflicted as I am, when he thus spoke of his confidence in God; or that his innocence, or his sanctity, gave him a sort of right to reckon upon the help of the Lord; but I am a sinner, unhappy and miserable." But you are mistaken: David was indeed a king, but a very unhappy one, overwhelmed with sufferings and humiliations; the pictures he has left us of his afflictions leave no doubt on this point. "Lord," he cried out, in the midst of his trials, "You are the God of my salvation, and my refuge, in the troubles that have encompassed me. I have cried in the day and in the night before Thee." (Psalm lxxxvii. 1.) "I sought the Lord, and He heard me; and He de-

livered me from all my troubles." (Psalm xxxiii. 5.) "My life is wasted with grief ; my life hath drawn nigh to hell. I am counted with them that go down to the pit. I am become as a man without help. They have laid me in the lowest pit ; in the dark places, in the shadow of death. My eyes languished through poverty. I am poor and in labours from my youth ; and being exalted, I have been humbled and troubled : friend and neighbour Thou hast put far from me, and my acquaintances, because of my misery. Thy wrath has come upon me, and Thy terrors have troubled me. With expectation I have waited for the Lord, and He was attentive to me ; and He heard my prayers, and He brought me out of the pit of misery, and the mire of dregs ; and He set my foot upon a rock, and directed my steps." (Psalm xxxix.) "I have cried to Thee, O Lord, and Thou hast healed me. Thou hast brought my soul from hell. Thou hast saved me from them that go down into the pit. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into joy. Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and hast compassed me with gladness ; to the end that my glory may sing to Thee, and that I may not forget. O my God, I will give praise to Thee for ever." (Psalm xxix. 12.)

These sorrowful words will sufficiently show you in what a state of affliction holy King David found himself. Yet, so far from his confidence in God being lessened by these trials, you see that it

became more lively and fervent, because he knew perfectly the heart of God. "He was persuaded," says St. Ambrose, "that the more unhappy we are, and the more we are deprived of other help, the more we have a right to expect it from His goodness; for the Lord is a good Father, He assists His children, when they have the most need of His protection." David acted in the same manner in his spiritual as in his temporal afflictions; the very greatness and number of his faults were in his eyes fit reasons to induce God to show him mercy. "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, Thou wilt pardon my sin, *for it is great.*" (Psalm xxiv. 11.) "My sins are very great, and very many, *therefore* for Thy name's sake, Thou wilt pardon them. The excess of my iniquities will manifest the magnificence of Thy mercy; and in forgiving me the malice of my heart, Thou wilt show the extent of Thy love."

4. It is true then that our infirmities, whether of soul or body, ought to animate rather than weaken our confidence in God. "And for whom is mercy needed," says St. Francis of Sales, "if not for the miserable?" If a charitable person were to build a magnificent hospital, with the view of receiving the unfortunate, the sick, the lame, the poor, covered with rags and sores, should such objects of compassion despair of being admitted, because of their miseries and infirmities? On the contrary, would they not suppose that in a house founded

for the express purpose of relieving and assisting the unfortunate, the gate would always be open to receive them? Well! the clemency, the mercy of the Lord, is the hospital for all sinners. He calls all, He invites all to enter it, and His most ardent desire is to see it filled, and thus to manifest the riches of His love, and His inexhaustible charity.

This is not an imagination, it is literally the idea which the Saviour Himself gives us in the Gospel. He prepares a great and splendid feast; it is a figure of the happiness of heaven. He invites every one to it. He sends His servants to make it known to all His acquaintances. But the greater number of them cannot or will not come; they have pressing engagements or occupations: one has bought a farm, and he must needs go and see it; another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them;" and a third said, "I have married a wife, and so I cannot come." All refuse, and make some excuse, whether good, feigned, or bad. What does the Master of the house do? He sends out His servants again, but it is into the streets and lanes of the city; it is to call to the feast the poor and the feeble, the blind and the lame; in a word, all the unfortunate. He sends His servants again into the highways and the hedges; He would have them to bring in all they should find, and that they should be asked, and urged, and compelled to come to the feast. It is the ardent desire of the good Master of the house, that it should be filled.

(St. Luke xv. 16.) Could God employ a more touching and expressive figure to make us understand the immense desire He has to treat us all with love, and to make us all happy with Him in in Heaven?

5. But let us prove the effects of God's mercy by examples; they make more impression on us than the simple statement of doctrine. The following instance, related by a holy Priest, occurred quite recently: "I was going over a prison," he says, "to take the consolations of religion to the unfortunate inmates who were confined there. I passed by a dark dungeon, where my guide told me there was a prisoner condemned to death for a horrible murder. I obtained leave to enter his cell, and I saw the murderer lying on a heap of straw, leaning his head sorrowfully on his breast. His whole appearance showed a man utterly cast down, and sunk in melancholy and despair. At the first word that he heard he raised his eyes, which terrified me by their expression of sullen gloom, and ferocious stupidity. 'What do you want with me?' said he, trembling. 'Is it death that you come to announce to me?—is it to-morrow?' 'My friend,' I replied, 'do not be alarmed; I come to announce to you peace, and to try and console your heart by the hope of pardon.' 'Is my punishment then changed? Am I not to die? Ah! if it were indeed so, I would promise to change my life, and to deserve my pardon.' And a joyful smile seemed to pass

over his gloomy countenance. 'You have not understood me, my friend,' I replied. 'I do not know what will be the decision on your petition for pardon. The pardon of which I speak is that which God always grants to those who repent.' At these words the unhappy man, recovering from his brief illusion, resumed his stolid and sullen expression of countenance; again crouching down, with his head in his hands, he seemed to be in a state of stupor. 'My dear friend,' I repeated, 'all is not yet lost. As long as you live there is always some hope. Your lot may perhaps be alleviated. Providence has so many means of delivering you from ruin. But whatever may be the sentence of human justice, God's justice will always be favourable to you, if you are willing it should be so. The Lord does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he may live, and be converted. Return to God, my dear friend; He is always a good Father, you are always His child, though you have been a very undutiful one. If you ask His pardon, if you confess your faults, He will receive you into His arms, as He received the prodigal son. You promised just now to change your conduct, and to merit your pardon, if your life were spared. Why not begin from this moment? Ah! if you do so, life will certainly be granted to you, a life for ever and ever. Your soul, dead to the grace of God, will return to life, to a life supernatural, a Divine life, which will restore you to peace of mind, and

will so raise you above your sufferings, that you will no longer be afraid to die—you will go to your death with the joy of a martyr.'

"The prisoner remained immovable, without giving any sign of feeling. Then I came nearer to him, I took his hand with affection; I did more, I threw my arms round him. He appeared somewhat moved. I prayed to my good angel to assist me. Oh, happiness! I then saw tears in his eyes. He was softened; I gave him a pious book; it was 'The Following of Christ.' He did not refuse it. I then left him, promising to come to him again the next day. On my return the following day, he said to me, 'Ah, why did I not sooner know the Religion of Jesus Christ? Why have I been left so ignorant of truths so touching, of duties so sacred, of hopes so sweet? Ah, if I had known these things, I should not be here.' The poor criminal had read some chapters of 'The Following of Christ.' 'How is it possible,' he continued, 'that I, such a wretched creature, the refuse and the scum of society, the horror and the execration of all men; how can I be destined to dwell in an abode of glory and happiness? Alas! that I have no time before me to reform my life! But it is too late; in a day or two, perhaps to-morrow, I must die. What means can there be to blot out this frightful stain of blood on my forehead?' 'My friend,' I replied, 'be comforted; a single instant is enough to disarm the justice of God, and to move Him to mercy. If

your repentance is sincere—were your conscience loaded with crimes as numerous as the grains of sand upon the sea-shore—God would pardon them all. He has given His ministers the power to absolve the greatest criminals, and even to grant them the Holy Eucharist, when they have been purified by an humble confession.’ ‘O my God,’ he exclaimed, ‘can it be possible? I could then pass from the depth of misery and abjection to the highest degree of dignity! I should have my share in the heavenly inheritance! I should no longer have before my eyes my poor brother cruelly murdered by my hand! For he would pardon me, even he, if God had pardoned me! But in taking away his life, if I have killed his soul! Horrible thought! God could not forgive me! He is too just—soul for soul, eternity for eternity.’ ‘My child, do not despair. Despair is the very greatest crime you can possibly commit. There is no sin which cannot be pardoned—not one. You can never exhaust the mercy of the Lord—it is infinite.’

“Here the prisoner threw himself at my knees, and begged me to hear the confession of his sins. Alas! how many crimes had he committed through ignorance and forgetfulness of God! how many gross and humiliating vices take possession of our heart when it gives itself up to its passions! The eyes of the poor prisoner were flooded with tears; the perspiration stood in large drops upon his forehead; his heart beat violently. ‘But, Father, I

may die to-morrow.' 'Well, my child, I will hear you again to-morrow morning, and if your repentance is as lively and as sincere as it is now, I will then give you absolution in the Name of Jesus Christ. And thus purified by repentance, you will be able to receive the Holy Communion. Your Saviour will give Himself up to you as the pledge of an eternal reconciliation.' 'Oh, happy moment,' he exclaimed, shedding tears of joy; 'why not to-day?' The poor criminal was already happy! He looked at me with a countenance which bespoke the burning desire he had of uniting himself to his God. The expression of his face, but lately so hard and coarse, had now assumed a character of mildness and resignation which made it pleasing to behold. The grace of God had entered his soul, and its Divine reflection had diffused itself over the brow of the poor culprit. 'Whatever may happen,' I said to him, 'to-morrow early I shall be with you. Spend the night in meditating on your past life, on the truths of Religion, on the hope of Heaven. Live as if you were instantly going to die; examine and search all the recesses of your heart, so that you may omit nothing in finishing the confession of your sins to-morrow, and in exciting yourself to repentance. Pray, pray, my son, with fervour, so that God in His mercy look upon you; the prayer of an humble heart pierces the clouds.'

"The next day had scarcely dawned when I was

already by the side of my dear penitent. He did not yet know that it was to be the last day of his life. He had spent the night in prayer, in tears, and sighs, deeply penitent for his sins. His heart, he told me, was yearning to receive the pardon of Heaven, and he begged me again to hear the confession of his most secret thoughts, and of his immense repentance. The most lively faith animated all his words ; his heart glowed and was consumed with ardent charity ; in the depths of his soul there was also a firm confidence ; but he had not as yet tasted that peace of God which strengthens it against all fear. In order to experience this repose, he said, the words of absolution must be pronounced over his guilty head, so that he might be able to say, when God should ask him, as he asked Cain, 'Where is your brother?' he might be able to reply, 'I have been absolved in Your Name.' No repentance could be more sincere. The unhappy criminal acted no longer from the fear of death ; he even wished to die immediately after he had received his pardon and the Holy Eucharist. I then pronounced the words of absolution. The penitent lay prostrate, with his face on the ground, his humbled forehead touched the prison floor. He prayed with all the strength of his soul, and tears of joy and gratitude flowed in streams from his eyes. Then he rose, and regarding me with a look of inexpressible tenderness, he made a movement as if to throw himself in my arms ; but he stopped

short, as if feeling unworthy of this paternal embrace. I guessed his thoughts, and I embraced him, pressing him to my heart with all my strength. 'Is it true,' he said, 'that I am cleansed from that frightful stain? I did not dare to believe that I could experience so great a happiness, so monstrous have been my crimes, and so deserving have I been of God's anger; but faith re-assures me, and gives me courage. Thou hast said it, O my God, Thou hast said it to Thy ministers: "All that you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven." I believe it, O my God, as if I had heard it from Thine own adorable mouth. How good Thou art, O Lord, and what can I do to thank Thee for this excess of mercy? Why can I not give my life immediately, to prove my love to Thee? Why can I not give it for the soul of my brother, killed by my hand? O how sweet would be my death, if before I expired I could receive for once only, the Bread of Heaven, reserved for the pure of heart!'

"His wish, his prayer was granted! At this moment the keeper of the prison entered the cell, and ordered the prisoner to descend to the chapel. He understood what it meant. I wished him to lean on me when crossing the court-yard. 'It is not necessary,' he said; 'I have never felt more strength and courage than I do now. I am so relieved and so happy now!' In the chapel we found the officer of justice with a paper in his hand; it contained his death-warrant. 'At what time?'

he asked. 'At mid-day,' was the answer. It was then five o'clock in the morning. We remained in the chapel alone. His face had not undergone any change; he was calm and resigned; the purity of his soul was reflected in his mild and gentle look; his brow showed all the noble and dignified expression of the just man. O my God, how You can, when You will, change the heart of Your miserable creatures! I prepared the altar for the Holy Sacrifice. He came to receive the Body of his God with the faith of a saint; his thanksgiving was an ecstasy of love. After the Holy Mass he was not the same man.

"'You can depart, Christian soul,' he said; 'I am about to die, and to die an ignominious death; but what a happiness for me to bear this mark of resemblance to my God! O Jesus! I did not deserve this honour! Be Thou blessed for ever, O Lord! Accept my death as a public reparation for my crimes. For Thy love I would willingly suffer a thousand other deaths still more cruel.'

"The hour was come; the gates of the prison were thrown open with a loud clang; without help he mounted the fatal car that was to convey him to the scaffold, and I placed myself at his side. He never ceased making acts of contrition, of faith, of hope, and love, all the way; he fervently recited the prayers for the agonising, and the Litanies of the Saints. I related to him some portions of the Passion of Jesus Christ. He was especially struck

with the words: 'Christ must needs suffer, and so enter into His glory.' 'Christ Himself, then,' he said, 'is an instance of the necessity of expiation, though He had no need of it for Himself. Alas! and we dare to complain, we fallen creatures, murmur if we have some slight pain to suffer, in order to have a share in the inheritance of heaven! O my God, for what high destiny have you created us, and how little is the expiation we make to merit so great a happiness! The car stops; we are at the place of execution.'

"He alighted with a firm step, and offered me his fettered hands, to help me to alight myself. 'Father, bless me,' he said, placing one knee on the ground. 'I ask you one last favour, if it is possible for me to obtain it. Place yourself at a distance from the scaffold, but so that I may be able to see the crucifix and yourself. I wish to die with my eyes fixed on the crucifix; that is, if they do not blindfold me.' He asked this favour of his executioners, and it was granted him. He had a moment to offer his soul to God, prostrate on the ground. When he arose I was by his side, and I gave him the crucifix to kiss and the last blessing. I folded him in my arms, and pressed him to my breast convulsively. I could hardly part from him. He gently disengaged himself, and I then placed myself at a little distance, on an isolated spot of rising ground, where he could see me. I raised the adorable sign of salvation as

high as I could, and he kept his eyes riveted on it. A deep silence reigned in the vast enclosure, which was filled with a dense crowd. All was ready, the signal was about to be given, when he asked permission to say a few words. 'My brethren,' he said, with a firm voice, 'it is just I should die ; but I die content, for I have been restored to the faith and the grace of God. May my repentance expiate a part of my sins ; may I serve as an example to my brethren. I ask of you a prayer for the repose of my soul, and of that of my victim. I beseech you all to pardon me and to pray for me.' After these words, he embraced his executioners, who were deeply moved to pity. He made the sign of the cross, and walked with a firm step to the guillotine. A roll of drums was heard, and in an instant all was over—the prisoner's soul was in eternity."

II.

THE AMIABLE QUALITIES OF THE SAVIOUR INSPIRE US WITH CONFIDENCE.

1. IF you read attentively—or, better still, if you have meditated, in the silence of your soul, on the consoling truths which have been treated of in the former part of this work, you must necessarily have conceived a boundless confidence in God's

Paternal Providence, Which has led you by ways, painful perhaps, but full of wisdom and of love. All the temporal trials which have afflicted you, and which afflict you still, have doubtless become much less bitter when regarded in the light of this adorable will. But is it so with the interior trials of conscience, often more insupportable than those of the body? Are you equally resigned to God's good pleasure when you are in spiritual desolation, which inflicts such torment upon the soul, and fills it with sadness and bitterness? Are you one of those fickle and light-minded persons who willingly abandon themselves to the guidance of Providence in temporal things, but who cannot resolve to confide in His mercy for spiritual things and for the supernatural gifts of grace? Are you one of those who are not over-anxious at the loss of property, of health, or of reputation; but who are exceedingly troubled when God sends them interior crosses, by the withdrawal of sensible graces—when they have a disrelish for prayer, perplexities of conscience, or a great fear of the judgments of God? “O ye of little faith,” said the Saviour, “wherefore do you doubt?” “Why these excessive apprehensions, this needless mistrust, when I seem to withdraw Myself from you? Why this distress, this discouragement, when you do not taste the sweetness of My presence? Am I not always your God and your Saviour? And are you not always the privileged children of My love, even when I

employ rigour in your regard? Leave it to the impenitent to dwell on the terrifying thoughts of My justice; let them be struck beforehand with the terrible sentence of My wrath; but for you who wish to serve Me, and to advance in the way of salvation, it is for you to consider rather the infinite goodness of My mercy. Let a filial dread of displeasing Me be always blended with that tender love and confidence which honours Me." Beware of the suggestions of the angel of darkness; he would terrify your imagination, he would seek to throw your soul into trouble by exaggerating your faults, and by representing God as an angry Judge, as a terrible and avenging Master, always irritated, always threatening." These are not the thoughts you ought to have of God, Who has created you with His own hands, and redeemed you with His own Blood. If the Lord whom you serve is your Judge, never forget that He is also your Father, that He is your Saviour, your Brother, your Spouse, your Friend, and that He would never have taken all these amiable titles in your regard, but to testify to you the greatness of His love, and to inspire you with the liveliest confidence.

2. "Yes, you are My friends." "I will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends." (St. John xv. 15.) "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name. You are entirely Mine. When you pass through the waters of tribulation and of interior trials, I will be with

you, and you shall not sink. When you pass through the fire of temptations, it shall not harm you, for I am with you, and I will always be your Saviour." "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, and called thee by thy name. When thou shalt pass through the waters, I will be with thee, and the waves shall not cover thee. When thou shalt walk in the fire thou shalt not be burnt, and the flames shall not burn in thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." (Isaias xliii. 2 and 3.)

What language could be more tender than that of our good God? What friendship was ever more sincere, more generous, more constant than that of Jesus? Let us search the earth for the person that loves us most. Is it that benefactor, that brother, that friend, that spouse? But what have they done for me? Have they given their life for me? Have they delivered me from death? Have they pardoned my treasons, my ingratitude? But Jesus has done all this for my love. Have they rescued me from poverty, and made me rich? Have they given me their body and blood to nourish and sustain the spiritual life of my soul? Have they made over to me all their treasures? Have they made me a partaker of their merits? But Jesus has done all this. Will they enable me to ascend to heaven? Will they make me happy for all eternity? Jesus has spared nothing to procure me this happiness—wealth, glory, felicity, life—He

has sacrificed everything for me. "His love," says St. Bernard, "has immolated everything for our wants, for our benefit. During the days of His mortal life, His love consecrated to us all His thoughts, all His joys, all His sadness, and all His fatigue. Not one word that Jesus spoke, not one movement that He made, not one step that He took, not one prayer that He offered, but what was for us. The soul of this new Jonathan, of this tender and faithful friend, was closely knit, was intimately joined to ours ; and He loved us as He loved Himself. He loved us, He thought of us, He had us always before His eyes. The sad trials you suffer He carried in His heart, He offered them to His Heavenly Father, He asked for you patience to suffer them, and the grace to make them meritorious for your sanctification. Jesus was not content to love us during His mortal life ; He wished to love us, to the consummation of the world, by consecrating to us and for us every moment of His Eucharistic life. What tenderness there is in the friendship of Jesus to desire to be so united to us, as that He might have but one heart and soul with us ! What generosity is there in this love ! To annihilate Himself, in a manner, under the appearance of Bread ! To deprive Himself of all sign of life, and to expose Himself to all the outrages of the impious, that He might be able to penetrate even to the very centre of our soul, and there to speak to us, Heart to heart, to

enrich us with His gifts, to deify all our thoughts, all our affections, and to raise us, if I may dare to say so, even to the dignity of the Supreme and Sovereign Being. For God became man, that man might become as God.

3. "Who does not know," says a holy religious, "that the peculiar mark of mutual love between friends is to lower what is high, and to raise up what is low—to remove all inequality, and establish such a resemblance between the two that each one may say: 'My friend is my other self.'" Admire, then, the wonderful inter-communication which this mutual love produces and establishes between two friends; one gives his heart to establish that of his friend, and his friend gives up his own reciprocally for the same intention. But love does not put the matter into an exact balance; it does not stop to weigh, as in a pair of scales, which of the two is heavier, or of the greater value. Each one is content, and each believes himself to be the gainer, and esteems himself the happier of the two. There is often, indeed, an inequality between them, but love is blind, it sees nothing of this inequality. O sacred love of Jesus, what are You doing when You are negotiating this admirable friendship? Do You not see the infinite inequality between Your Heart and that of Your creature? Who would not be struck with admiration to behold a God making the first advances, and showing Himself to be most anxious and eager to form this intercourse with man, as if

He Himself were to derive the greater advantage from it? He asks of man to give Him his heart in return for His own! "My son," He says, "are you willing to give Me your heart if I give you Mine?" "But, O Divine Majesty, do You not see that there is no proportion between the two hearts, and that You bestow an infinite good, to receive in return a mere nothing?" "Yes, but My love prevents Me from seeing this difference. From the moment that I love him he becomes so precious to Me that I regard him as My other self; I treat him as a God, since I love him with the same love with which I love My own Divinity. He has My heart, and I possess his. Love makes us walk with an equal pace." O inestimable happiness, O infinitely precious treasure, that we find in the friendship of Jesus! If our heart is His, there is no truth more certain than that His Heart is ours.

This is not merely a pious belief, it is a truth which God Himself has been pleased to confirm by a miracle. St. Elizabeth of Hungary once asked her spiritual father if she could love God as much as she was loved by Him. "Yes," he replied, "you can love Him as much as He loves you, but not with your own heart, it is too narrow." "But how shall I be able to love Him, if not with my own heart?" exclaimed the Saint. "You can love Him," replied her Director, "with the Heart which He gives you, and which is no other than His own. That Heart being]infinite, and containing within

itself all the love which He has for Himself, you will love Him as much as He loves Himself, as much as He Himself loves His own Divine Person.” “This would be true,” said St. Elizabeth, “if the Heart of God were mine, by the ties of reciprocal love; and if, when I loved God, His Divine love, together with the Holy Spirit, were indeed my real possession, and, as it were, my own property. But how can I be persuaded that I possess so great a happiness? What means are there to assure me that I enjoy so great a blessing? I could rather believe that yonder tree on the other side of the river” (for they were conversing by the river-side) “could pass over to this side, where we now are, than to believe that God had graciously deigned to make this admirable exchange—to give me His Heart for my own!” O miracle of God’s goodness! Hardly had she uttered these words when the tree of which she had spoken was visibly uprooted by an invisible hand, transported across the river, and transplanted where the holy Queen was standing, to give her a sensible proof and manifestation of this great truth! Who can say what happened to her after this? What love took possession of her heart! What sentiments of confidence filled her soul! She stood as if in ecstasy, without speaking, apparently without breathing; it was feared she would have died of love and gratitude.

4. “It is impossible,” says a holy Religious, “that any one, however wicked or despairing, should not

feel his confidence revive, if he reflects ever so little on the infinite tenderness of Jesus Christ, not only towards the just, but especially, and in a more particular manner, towards sinners." What greater sinner was there ever than Judas, the infamous traitor, who sold his God and Saviour, who betrayed the Holy of Holies into the hands of the enemies? Yet see the infinite mercy of this Man-God! Admire the sweetness and infinite clemency of this good Master, when this unworthy Disciple accosted Him in the Garden of Olives. Judas was a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing. Was not that the very moment to reproach the Apostate for his base perfidy, to make him feel the heinousness of his crime, to cover him with shame for daring to commit so frightful a deed? No doubt any one less merciful than Jesus would have thought it his duty to do so. But it was not in the character of the Lamb of God to act with such rigour; besides, such a course would have been more calculated to drive Judas to despair than to lead him to contrition; and Jesus, who wished to try every gentle means, and not to crush the bruised reed, endeavoured to soften the hardness of his heart by exciting him to feelings of repentance. "Friend," said Jesus to him, "whereto art thou come?" O immense love! O love without bounds! O my Saviour, are You not mistaken? You call the most wicked of men Your friend! "Yes, he is still My friend; and were he a thousand times more culpable, I

should still have a Father's heart for him, I should always be ready to receive him into My arms, and to pardon his crime."

Doubtless the Saviour knew perfectly all the wickedness of that apostate soul, coming to Him, as Judas did, and embracing Him that he might the better betray Him; Jesus knew all the malice and ingratitude of his heart, but so far from repelling him, He goes forward to meet him, and feeling a deep compassion for him, he yields to the wishes of Judas. He embraces him with affection and the most tender charity. He presses him to His Heart, as a last effort of His tenderness, in order to melt his stony heart and move it to contrition. The kiss of Jesus was perfectly sincere; but what could be more touching than His words: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" And we must not think that this word "friend" was used by chance or custom, and had no express signification in the mouth of God, all whose words are "spirit and life." It is not without a most important motive that the Holy Spirit has preserved it to us. He would have us to understand that there is no sinner, however great his sins may be, for whom God has not a Father's love and feelings of mercy even to the last moment of his life. For when the Saviour said "Friend," He really felt towards Judas all that this word expresses—that is to say, true and sincere friendship, an immense desire to rescue him from sin and from eternal damnation. But the

wretched Judas consummates his crime. The Lamb of God is in the hands of furious wolves. Bruised, tormented, torn to pieces, He is dragged along the path of blood and suffering to expire even for him who came to betray Him. O Judas, what have you done? But oh, unhappy sinner, what are you going to do? What! to despair? Is there no pardon for you? Ah, go and throw yourself at the feet of your good Master; He will still bless you. Go and ask Him on the Cross for His grace and pardon; go and listen to His last words. He is praying for you; return to Him. He prays to His Father to forgive His executioners. You will console His heart. He will die content. See His arms stretched out to receive you; His head bent down to embrace you; His bosom open to load you with His graces. Unhappy man! If you knew the love of Jesus, even at this moment, when He is dying, the victim of your crime; if you knew how His heart beats with tender affection for you! Have you forgotten that He came into the world to die for sinners, for the lost sheep of Israel, and not for the just? that the greatest sinners are the objects of His greatest zeal, because their salvation is a greater manifestation of His mercy? Have you forgotten that He said to His Disciples, that He said to *yourself*, that we must pardon repentant sinners, not only seven times, but seventy times seven; that is to say, always; we must forgive them an

unlimited number of offences? What have you then to fear?

It is all in vain ; the wretched Judas stifles all remorse. He forgets the great mercy of his Good Master, and he consummates the greatest of all crimes by falling into despair. This was to Jesus the most cruel torment of His Passion. O what grief for the heart of this tender Lamb, to see a soul perish, and that His own disciple, His apostle, for whom He was shedding His Blood, for whom He was giving His Life ! To see him escape for ever beyond the reach of His zeal and solicitude, and precipitate himself into the eternal abyss !

5. But Jesus is not only a tender and compassionate Friend, but a powerful Advocate, deeply interested in the cause of our salvation. What an additional motive to hope in Him ! Yes, the Saviour has the greatest interest in undertaking our defence, in pleading our cause, in obtaining for us the victory over our spiritual enemies ; for they are also the enemies of His glory, and our cause is none other than His own. Is it not for the interest of our Saviour, is it not for His own glory, to preserve in us the treasure of those graces, which He has acquired for us at the cost of so much labour ? Would He, therefore, be willing to lose all those graces which He has bestowed upon us for our salvation ? Would He allow the fruit of His Passion, the price of His blood, and the merit of His sufferings, to perish ? Do we not see

that He is even more interested in our happiness than we are ourselves? For if we are not saved, all that He has done for us is useless. His labours are useless, His fatigues, His sorrows, His torments, His life, His death—are all useless; the only result of so many sacrifices, will be regret for having suffered in vain for the ungrateful. Thus we see in the parables of the Gospel, that He plans all His own happiness, so to speak, in making us happy. See Him under the figure of the woman seeking for the groat she had lost; of the shepherd going after the sheep that had gone astray. After much labour, they both find what they had lost, and forthwith they assemble their friends to tell them the good news—just as we relate to each other any happy event in which we are interested. They wish to be congratulated for having been so fortunate. The shepherd does not say, “Congratulate my sheep on his return, that he has escaped being devoured by wild beasts;” no, it is himself that he wishes to be congratulated. “Rejoice with me,” he says, “because I am so happy; I am transported with joy, and I desire others to share it with me. All the labours and difficulties I have gone through I count as nothing—my sheep is found, and I am extremely glad.” You see, then, that the riches and happiness of the shepherd appear to consist entirely in this one sheep, as if he could neither be rich nor happy without it. Could the Son of God show us more clearly the deep interest

he takes in our salvation, and could He have chosen a more fitting means to inspire us with confidence ?

This is not all. We have in Jesus Christ an Advocate whose rights over our celestial inheritance are incontestable ; for He is not a Mediator who simply asks mercy for you with a kind of fear, because He has no title but that of compassion to obtain it for us. No ; Jesus Christ is an Advocate who demands justice, and He demands it with firmness, with authority, with assurance, and confidence. He demands it on the faith of documents which He produces ; and far from being afraid of the justice of that tribunal before which He pleads, it is in the justice of that very tribunal that He places His confidence. He pleads our cause with those documents in His hands, and they are the sacred wounds with which He ascended into Heaven, and which he preserves, that He may continually show them to His Father as the purchase-money He has paid to obtain His Father's mercy. It is not, then, in our own name that we ask for grace and salvation ; it is not in virtue of our own good works that we implore the Divine mercy. No ! if even the just man prayed to God by the sole merit of his tears, he would be rejected as unworthy of being heard. What price, then, must we offer to God, in order to obtain His grace and our salvation ? There is no other price to offer to God, than that paid by His Son—the price of His Cross, His Sufferings, His Blood, and His Wounds ! It is a price equal in value to that

of God's mercy which we implore, and of the graces which we need and that we may expect to receive.

What a ground of confidence is it for us, when, uniting ourselves to the Priest in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we can say to God, "Behold, O Lord, behold Thy well-beloved Son ; I offer Him to You because He is mine, You have given Him to me, and He has given Himself for my salvation. It is a treasure of infinite value, as infinite as are Your graces and Your mercy. However high the price at which You value Heaven and Your mercy, I shall always have an Equivalent to offer You for them, because it is a God I offer you."

The great Albuquerque, the conqueror of Eastern India, seeing himself in danger of being shipwrecked in a violent storm which endangered his vessel, took a little child in his arms, and raised it towards Heaven, as if to calm the tempest and to stay the chastisement with which God was about to punish his crimes. When there shall arise spiritual tempests within your soul, when the imagination is excited, and the judgment is agitated and disturbed, when the billows of interior desolation threaten you with utter shipwreck, imitate this great captain—offer the Divine Child Jesus, the Lamb of God—He is your own—and your spirit will soon be restored to calm.

6. "You are very unfortunate," said the passers-by to a poor invalid, overcome with pain and covered with rags, but who had continued to be

full of faith in the midst of his misery. "Why call me unfortunate?" replied he. "No, no, you are mistaken; be assured that I have God for my Father, and that I am His child. I consider myself happier than the most fortunate of mankind." He was right. Nothing is more exalted in the eye of faith than the title of a child of God; nothing is more touching to the heart of man than to think that God is his Father, that he can call Him by that sweet name, and that he daily receives from Him fresh testimonies of His paternal love, in the numberless graces bestowed upon him. "What father," exclaims Tertullian, "was ever such a Father as our God is, whom we serve? God is more a Father than all the fathers in the world, and more merciful than any one in the world." He loves all men. He wishes for the salvation of all. But the unhappy and the miserable are the especial objects of His tenderness; it is for poor sinners that He manifests His predilection. It even seems that it is sufficient to be a sinner to have a share in the kindness of His heart. Sin, by disfiguring man, has made him more worthy of His compassion. God considers him always as His creature, the work of His hands, and even as His child.

The kindness of David towards his son Absalom may give us an idea of God's goodness towards sinners. This holy king, drawn from his throne by his unnatural son, still retained for him, ungrateful as he was, the tenderness of a father.

When, in order to save his own life, he was obliged to take up arms against his son, and to pursue him as a rebel, his first care before the battle was to recommend his officers and soldiers to spare his son's life. Providence ordered it otherwise, and Absalom met with the end that his conduct deserved. David, the conqueror of his seditious subjects, is insensible to the victory he has gained. He feels nothing but the death of his son. He sheds torrents of tears; he would rather have sacrificed his kingdom, and even his life, to save that of his unfortunate son. "O my son, my dear son Absalom, would that I might die for thee; Absalom, my son; my son Absalom." (2 Kings xviii. 33.) We here see an image of the tenderness which God our Father has for us, even when we revolt against Him by sin. He preserves our life, even when we make use of it to outrage Him. All the creatures we abuse, in order to displease Him, demand our death; and this loving, this amiable Father seems to say to them, "No, no; he is My son—spare his life."

An ancient author (Valerius Max., book V., chap. v.) relates a striking instance of paternal love. There was a father, who had but one son, but such an unnatural son, that, without having any reason to be discontented, he one day resolved to assassinate his father, the author of his life. The father, knowing for certain his son's intention, asked him to accompany him in a walk. He led

his son into the midst of a thick forest, where no one could either see or hear them. Then seeing they were quite alone, the father drew forth a dagger which he had concealed under his cloak. "My son," said he, "take this dagger, and satisfy the desire you have to take away my life. I have brought you into this forest to prevent your being seized by the officers of justice, and I have done this to save both your honour and your life. Since I am so unhappy as to displease you, here is my heart; you can give me my death-blow in all security—nobody sees you. Thus, in dying, I shall have the consolation of concealing the foul crime of your parricide." The young man, perverse as he was, could not refrain from tears; he threw himself at his father's feet, and exclaimed, in broken accents, "Live, father, live on; it is for me to die. I have too richly deserved it. Turn your weapon against myself; I can no longer face the light, after having been so wicked." He could say no more, his words were lost in his sobs. His father melted into tears, and threw his arms around his son's neck, transported with joy at seeing him thus moved. They continued a long while in a mutual embrace, neither of them being able to speak, but by tears.

Doubtless we are not surprised at seeing this son so affected by the goodness of such a father. But what should we have thought if, resisting every feeling of nature, he had seized the dagger,

to execute his horrible design? We should not have found words to express our indignation at the sight of such ingratitude. Alas! is not this the conduct of so many sinners, who, instead of being moved by God's tenderness, only repay His love by fresh crimes and outrages? How is it they are not afraid of wearying His patience, of provoking His wrath, and of bringing down just punishment upon themselves? But no! God is as slow to punish as He is prompt to pardon. He bears with our insults, our contempt, the unworthy preference we give to creatures, rather than let His hand fall heavily upon us. "It is not from want of power," saith the Scripture, "but on the contrary, because He is infinite in power, that He appears to be afraid to exercise it." What goodness is this, to hold His enemy in His hands, to be able to punish him without difficulty, and without injustice, and yet to spare him, even while he insults Him! King Saul understood that David had a true friendship for him, when he heard that this holy man, who was so hateful to him, and whom he sought to destroy, had had the opportunity of taking his revenge upon him, by depriving him of life, but that he had spared him. Saul was moved even to tears. Thenceforth he called David by the sweet name of son, he blessed him, he said to him with admiration, "I see clearly that you love me, and that my life is precious in your sight, since you spared it when you had the power to take it away." Oh, let us

address this language to our Divine Saviour, Whose mercy to us has been a thousand times greater than that of David. Say to Him, "I see clearly that You love me, O my Redeemer, since You have spared me so often. Yes, Lord, what reasons I have for putting my confidence in You! If You have been so good to me, when I provoked You by my crimes, what may I not expect of Your tenderness now that I have recourse to You, and that I wish to make amends by my tears, and by my sincere repentance!"

III.

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE DIVINE PROMISES, A SECOND MOTIVE FOR CONFIDENCE.

1. IF, as we have just seen, the infinite goodness of God is the most touching motive to dispose our heart to a great confidence in Him, we may add that the infallibility of His promises is one of the most solid grounds for strengthening it. Yes, the truthfulness of God, that adorable attribute which renders Him incapable of error or falsehood, the attribute on which rests the infallibility of His word, this is the firmest foundation of the Christian's hope. This veracity of God is the Mount Sion on which the Saints have reared the entire edifice of their salvation. This is the impregnable

tower of David, armed with a thousand bucklers to defend us from the terrors of God's judgments, and at whose base we lose all our excessive fears, all our unjust mistrust, and that multitude of gloomy thoughts which issue forth from hell, from the depth of the abyss, to assail our soul, and fill it with trouble. The justice of God itself, so terrible to the sinner, and sometimes even to the just, has nothing in it to alarm him, whose soul is established and built on this foundation of confidence in the promises of God. What do I say? This very justice, far from being a motive for fear, as it is to some timorous or ill-instructed souls, becomes, for those who trust in God's infallible promises, the most solid ground for their confidence. For they reason thus: Faith teaches us, and reason, also, that it is a part of God's justice to be faithful to His promises, that it is a part of His justice to keep His word, that it is a part of His justice to observe His oath. Now, has not God promised in every page of the Holy Scripture, so to speak, that "whosoever shall call upon His name shall be saved?" Has He not given His word, that all those who hope in Him shall never be confounded? Has He not assured us, with an oath, that He will pardon our iniquities, whenever we return to Him with a contrite and humble heart? How, then, after the promise of a God infinitely just, after the word of a God sovereignly equitable, after the oath of a God infinitely holy, how can I entertain any

sentiment of distrust, as to my salvation, if I wish sincerely to have recourse to Him, and to obtain His grace? It is, indeed, through His great mercy that He has thus bound Himself to receive us; but since He has thus vouchsafed to bind Himself, He is obliged, by fidelity to His justice, to fulfil the promises, which, through the tenderness of His mercy, He has made us. And would it not be doing Him the greatest injustice to doubt the sincerity of His engagements; or to think Him capable of violating His promise, His word, His oath? Nothing is more sacred in the intercourse of life, than the word of an honest man; it is regarded as a sure pledge of his fidelity, of his honour, and his integrity; and when it has once been given us, we rely upon it with such assurance, that the least suspicion of unfaithfulness never enters our minds. Why, then, have we not the same confidence in the word of God, of a God whose justice is as infinite as His mercy; whose word is eternal, inviolable, sacred? . . . Have we not this Divine Word, dictated by the Holy Spirit, written in the Holy Gospel, the Book of Life, which we shall one day be able to produce, before His tribunal, if (which is impossible) God should fail in fidelity in our regard? It is in this Divine Book, that He has pledged Himself a thousand times to assist us in all our wants, both temporal and spiritual, to protect us in all our perils, and to grant us all that we hope for from His goodness. He declares that

there is no necessity so great, no danger so pressing, no evils so overwhelming, from which He will not deliver all those who have recourse to Him. "If you return and be quick," saith the Lord, by the prophet Isaias, "you shall be saved ; in silence and in hope shall your strength be." "I will do for My children what the good shepherd does for his flock ; I will seek out those who have wandered from Me by sin ; I will raise up those who have fallen from fatigue and discouragement in the way of salvation. I will dress the wounds of those who languish in suffering ; I will give strength to the weak, clothing to the naked, and consolation to the afflicted. Call on Me, O children of men, invoke Me in the time of affliction ; you will honour My name, and I shall make it a duty to help you. Yes, I will deliver this afflicted one from his misery , because he has hoped in Me, I will deliver him, I will protect him, because he has invoked My name. I am with him in tribulation. I will deliver him, and I will glorify him ; I will fill him with length of days, and will show him My salvation." (Psalm xc. 14.)

2. How can we refuse to place confidence in such formal promises, coming from the mouth of a God, who is the Eternal Wisdom, and Infallible Truth ? What means has He left unemployed to inspire us with this confidence ? What touching comparisons does He not make use of in the Gospel, to convince His Disciples of the immense desire He had to hear

their prayers? "There was a wicked judge in a certain city, who feared not God, nor regarded man; and there was a certain widow in the city, and she came to him, saying, Avenge me on my adversary; and he would not for a long time, but afterwards said within himself, Although I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow is troublesome to me, I will avenge her wrongs, lest, continually coming, she weary me." (St. Luke xviii.) "Remark," said our Lord, "take notice of the words of this judge; wicked as he was, he could not resist a persevering prayer; he yields to importunity, in spite of himself, and he grants this woman what she asks. Will not God, then, the Sovereign Justice, avenge His Elect, who cry to Him day and night? And will He delay to do so? I say unto you, that He will quickly avenge them." "Oh, infinite goodness!" exclaims a pious author, "God deigns to compare Himself to a wicked judge, to inspire us with confidence! If prayer has such power over an inexorable judge, that it appeases him, and makes him yield to feelings of compassion, what influence must not prayer have with our Heavenly Father, the Father of Mercies, and the God of all consolation?"

3. But because the word "judge" has something terrible in it which repels us, our Saviour has vouchsafed in another parable to compare Himself to a friend, in order to convince us by a name so sweet that we may hope for everything from His good-

ness. "And He said unto them: Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and shall say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine has come off his journey to me, and I have not what to set before him. And he from within should answer and say: Trouble me not, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise, because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given to you: Seek, and you shall find: Knock, and it shall be opened to you." (St. Luke xi. 5.)

Judge by this example what confidence ought to animate our prayers when we address ourselves to God! What friend can be more tender and compassionate than the Lord! What an immense desire He has to load us with His gifts, and how easy it is for Him to do so! If one man could so trust in another as to go to him during the night, to disturb him in his sleep, to knock at his door with importunity, and not cease till he had obtained what he asked; and if his friend at last grants his request, not because he is his friend, but because he has wearied him, what may we not expect of God, always ready to hear us, always disposed to grant our requests, and Who, instead of being annoyed at our importunity,

is delighted to be pressed by our earnest entreaties ! And how great ought to be our confidence, our conviction, our certainty, of obtaining from Him all that is necessary, whether for our temporal or our spiritual welfare !

“Oh,” exclaims St. Peter Chrysologus, “may He Who teaches us in what manner we may do Him violence, take care to defend Himself against those who offer it to Him ! How easy it is for us to gain admission into the house when the Master Himself points out the way of entrance !”

Yet our Divine Saviour does not stop at this illustration, touching as it is ; but in order to shut out all distrust, He compares Himself to a father, or, rather, He calls Himself our Father, and us His children, a title which implies a stronger and more tender affection than even that of a friend. It is thus that He speaks to His Disciples : “Which of you, if he ask his father for bread, will he give him a stone ? or a fish, will he give him a serpent ? or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion ? If then you, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him ?” (St. Luke xi. 11.)

Have you remarked all the force of these words ? Do you see how our Lord likens Himself to a most hard and wicked father ? He pictures to Himself, as it were, all the fathers of families that are in the world, and He singles out one of them who is the

most destitute of feeling, one who has the most cruel and barbarous heart, and He asks His disciples if this father, wicked as he is, would be so cruel to his own son as to offer him a stone when he asks him for bread? "Well, then," our Lord adds, "when you doubt My goodness, when you fear that I shall refuse you what you ask of Me, you think Me more wicked than this hard-hearted father. I am your God, your Father; it is I who formed you with My hands, created you in My own image and likeness; I who have poured out My Blood to rescue you from hell, Who have given My life to snatch you from death!"

4. But our Lord is not content to give His word; "He has vouchsafed to confirm it by an oath, in order to show us," saith St. Paul, "the immutable stability of His promises, and to inspire us with confidence, the more solid, as it rests upon two immovable foundations—the word of God, and the oath of God." "What a happiness it is for us," exclaims Tertullian, "that God vouchsafes to take an oath in our favour, in order to convince us, in an unmistakable manner, of the sincere desire He has to fulfil His engagements: We are miserable indeed," says this Father, "if we refuse to believe even the oath of God."

"Unhappy children," does our Saviour say to us, "will nothing, then, give you confidence in Me? I pledge My word that I will take care of you, and that I will provide for you in all your necessities.

Do you not know that I am your Creator and your Father? And do not these titles make it an obligation for Me to watch over you and provide for all your wants? If you want any thing, come to Me; can a father refuse to give a child what he asks with filial love? No; I take My oath that I will be your buckler against all your enemies, your physician in all your sickness, your guide in all your ways, your counsellor in all your doubts, your refuge in all your dangers, and your infallible resource in all your necessities. Amen, amen, I say to you, I assure you," saith Jesus Christ, "if you confide in Me, you shall renew your strength, you shall be clothed with My power, you shall work miracles, and even greater miracles than I worked myself; you shall ask nothing of my heavenly Father which you shall not obtain. You shall say to this mountain: be thou cast into the sea, and the mountain shall obey you, for nothing shall be impossible to him who believeth, that is, who has confidence in Me."

It would be necessary to quote almost every page of the Holy Scripture, if we were to enumerate all the promises of God to those who hope in Him. But what need is there of such repeated asseveration, when a God is concerned? Had He only said to us these words: "Come to Me, all ye that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you," these words alone, coming from the mouth of God, are infallible. Our Lord has said: "Heaven and earth

shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away," they will endure for ever. It is, then, in virtue of this sacred word, it is on the faith of this inviolable promise, that I can ask of God all the helps I need both for body and soul, whether for time or for eternity. Ask, then, and ask with confidence; it is a right which God has given you, and this right is incontestable, because it is founded on the Justice of Him who is Almighty. Hence it is, then, that our confidence should be invincible; hence it is that we may say, with the Royal Prophet: "I have remembered, O Lord, thy judgments of old, and I was comforted." (Ps. cxviii. 52.) "I have remembered the sanctity of Your promises, I have understood Your fidelity to Your word, and I have placed in You all my confidence."

5. The great Apostle, who had penetrated so deeply into the mysteries of the Divine Perfections, was thoroughly convinced of this truth when he said: "There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me on that day; and not only to me, but to all those who love His coming." (2 Tim. iv. 8.) What is it you say, O great Apostle? are you not mistaken? What! God owes you a crown of justice! On what title, then, has the Almighty become your debtor? What have you done to acquire such a right? What have you given Him? Is it on your good works that you found this title of justice? No, the Apostle has no such pretension; he well knows that all our

merits are of no worth, unless they are covered with the merits of Jesus Christ, and that, according to St. Augustine, the holiest life has everything to fear, if God examines it, without mercy. It is this consideration which should console those who are afflicted because they have no good works to offer to God, and who are therefore discouraged. On what, then, does St. Paul ground this title of justice? On the promises of God. "God is faithful," he says; "He has promised to show us mercy, in consideration of the sufferings of His Son, and it is for this reason that His Son gave Himself up to death for us, that He took upon Himself all our iniquities, and that He has washed us in His Blood. He has said by His Prophet: 'When the wicked turneth himself away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth justice and judgment, he shall surely live and not die.' (Ezech. xviii.) It is on this promise, then, that I establish my confidence. God continues eternally faithful to His word, and to His promise. He cannot renounce Himself. Now He would renounce His justice, if He failed to keep His word, if He were unfaithful to His promise, if He violated His oath. But such perjury is impossible in a God infinitely holy. Take courage, then, this Divine justice which appears to you so terrible, and which often casts you into trouble of mind, should be the firmest ground of your confidence. 'The more just God is,' you should say, 'the more I ought to hope in Him; for the greater

His justice is, the more certain it is that He will keep His word. If there is anything I ought to fear, it is the want of confidence in Him, the want of sufficient faith in His goodness of heart, and in the infinite love He bears me."

6. We have an example of this in the following fact, as related by a Priest of great virtue. "On going through the wards of a hospital," he says, "during a severe winter, I came to the bedside of a poor old man severely afflicted, both in his body and in his circumstances. Bent down under the weight of ninety years, he was overwhelmed by all sorts of trials ; a burning fever tormented him day and night ; he had pains in his head and stomach, and the gout did not allow him a moment of ease. He was deprived of all human consolation, forsaken by his relations, and abandoned by his friends, who used to be so assiduous in their attention to him in the days of his prosperity. For, he had been both fortunate and happy ; he had been till lately in the possession of a considerable property. The events of the Revolution had reduced him to this sad indigence ; a succession of distressing accidents had deprived him of the most beloved members of his family ; he had just bewailed the loss of the last of his children, who died in defence of the faith. This unfortunate old man, on the brink of the grave, the victim of so many sufferings all at once, was awaiting death to put a happy termination to his extreme misery. He awaited it, with

the resignation of a Christian. Wonderfully sustained by the Faith, he endured his sufferings with the patience of a martyr. How often he was heard to cry out, with holy Job, of whom he was a worthy rival, 'If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil things?' (Job ii. 10.) His love of God seemed to increase with his troubles. He was greatly afflicted when he heard His Holy Name blasphemed. Unhappily, several of the sick who were in the same ward with him, but too frequently kept up an infernal chorus of blasphemies. This pious nonagenarian, feeble and suffering as he was, could hardly raise his voice sufficiently to reprove their impiety; he therefore contented himself with praying for them, and offering his sufferings to God for their conversion. We shall soon see that his charitable efforts were not unavailing.

"By the side of his bed there was a poor mechanic, the father of a family, whose excessive and continual labour had ruined his health. He was attacked by a mortal illness, was unable to work, and was deprived of all resource; he often had the sorrow to see at his bedside his wife in tears, and his children in rags, asking for bread. The poor sufferer, thus deprived of all human help, would have found support under his trials in the consolations of religion, but from this resource he had been entirely cut off; he was an unbeliever; or rather he was one of those, who without rejecting

the principles of the faith, are indifferent to the practice of it. He was a man gross and vulgar in his manners, and still more so in his language, and the faculties of his mind seemed, in a manner, brutalized by the absence of all Christian sentiment, and by a life wholly given to the senses. Hence, when his pains became violent, his usual resource was to abandon himself to blasphemies and to despair. What a contrast, by the side of this unhappy artisan, was the good old man, of whom we have spoken, more suffering, perhaps, in body, than the poor mechanic, but whose soul was full of joy and strength, visibly reflected in his serene and tranquil countenance! Here was a proof of the power of religion! The old man grieved less at his own sufferings than at the sad state of his companion. He pitied him, he prayed for him, he tried to console him, he endeavoured to touch his heart by some consideration which the faith inspires. ‘My dear friend,’ he said to him, in the kind manner of a father speaking to his son, ‘My dear friend, why, deprived of all support as you are, oppressed by so many afflictions, why do you not address yourself to Him who alone can comfort you, who has no desire but to do you good? Do you think that God cannot relieve your sorrows?’ ‘If He can,’ replied the artisan, in a vexed and impatient manner, ‘why does He not do so? Why am I so sorely afflicted, while He allows others to live in pleasure and prosperity?’ ‘But

have you ever had recourse to Him? Have you invoked Him in your afflictions? He has promised His help to all those who trust in His goodness. If you pray to Him with confidence, be assured that He will be faithful to His promise, for He is a God infinitely just.' 'A God infinitely just,' replied the artisan, 'how can I believe that, when I see the way in which He has treated me? Is it just to heap all kinds of blessings on the rich man, and to crush a poor working man, the father of a family, with all sorts of misfortunes at once? Can I see without indignation so many rich families living in luxury, while my poor children have not bread to eat? Why is it that there are so many people living in commodious and elegant mansions, their splendid apartments furnished with every luxury, who can have, at a wish, warm and suitable clothing, a table abundantly supplied with the best of food, soft beds and carpets, and firing, and who enjoy robust health; why do they have all these good things, while I and my poor family are huddled together in a damp and dark room lying on beds of straw, made hard by long use, without bedding, almost without clothing, without furniture, without a fire, and condemned in a severe winter to endure all the horrors of cold and hunger? Is God a just God to give everything to some and nothing to others? Is this goodness? Is this mercy?'

"Our good old man was pained to hear such complaints and murmurs against Almighty God,

and to see so much ignorance and misery combined in this unhappy man. He endeavoured to correct his mistakes, and to enlighten his mind as to the great designs of God's Providence, for He arranges everything with wisdom and goodness. 'My dear friend,' he replied, 'I agree with you that your position is a very sad one. Yes, without doubt, it is painful to find one's self in such a state of trial and suffering. I know by experience, as well as yourself, the bitterness and the desolation we feel, in the afflictions we meet with here below ; on this point you may believe an old man, who has been trained, like yourself, in the school of misfortune. But even for the most severe trials I have found a sovereign remedy. I had recourse to the consolations of religion, and I have thus found so much strength and sweetness, that my afflictions have almost changed their nature in my regard ; they have become a source of comfort to me. Our holy religion has taught me the great secret of Providence, in the distribution of the goods and evils of this life. The secret of God's Providence in sending us sufferings in this life is but little understood ; but our holy religion has taught me, that God treats us with rigour here, only that we may enjoy more of his consolations in eternity ; and that the afflictions He sends us while we are on this earth, so far from being the effects of His wrath, are, on the contrary, the greatest proofs of His love.' 'Proofs of His love !' replied the artisan with

bitterness ; 'what love is it to torment one who is unfortunate, and to take pleasure in his sufferings ?' 'Do not be impatient, my friend, let me explain to you what I mean. God takes no pleasure in tormenting you. If He afflicts you it is because He is forced to do so, from the love He has of your salvation ; it is because He wishes to save you from eternal death. Would you be acting cruelly to your child, if, in spite of his tears and cries, you were to snatch from his hand a fatal instrument, which would cause his death ? Is the doctor cruel to you in your sickness, when, in order to cure you, he prescribes a bitter medicine, or a painful operation, without which you cannot recover your health ? Answer me : you have too much good sense, I am sure, to accuse him of cruelty ; on the contrary, you would say that he is performing an act of humanity and charity. Now, you may say the same of God. He is a doctor, who wishes to restore you to health ; not the health of the body, but the health of the soul.' 'Oh ! as for the health of the soul,' exclaimed the poor ignorant mechanic, 'I can do very well without that ; it is the health of the body I want, and what my poor children want also.' 'Wretched man ! what have you said ?' replied the good old man. 'Do you not know that your soul is everything to you ? that your only business in this world is to save it ; and that if you lose it by impatience and blasphemy you will suffer an infinity of miseries in the next

world ; miseries far more frightful than those you are suffering now ?' ' Ah ! it is this which makes me despair ! To suffer for ever ! O God ! to suffer in this life, and to suffer in the next ! This is what a priest threatened me with the other day. O, barbarity ! O God, how you are . . . ' The old man interrupted him, to prevent him giving vent to his blasphemy. ' My friend, there is no barbarity in this. If you suffer here with the view of expiating your sins, you will not suffer in the next life ; be persuaded of this, it is a truth which faith teaches us. God sends you this affliction with no other design, than to spare you the pains of hell. Therefore it is that the Scripture tells us to receive with joy all the trials that happen to us, because they are the pledge of our eternal predestination. Jesus Christ Himself calls those blessed who suffer, and who mourn, and that the poor are blessed, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The Holy Spirit declares that we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, but through many afflictions and tribulations, and that it is by suffering very great adversities, and doing violence to ourselves, that we can gain the glory of heaven ; and that they are truly happy who endure the bitter trials of this life with patience and resignation.'

" The good old man was fatigued, he could not continue the conversation ; and besides, he saw that his suffering disciple was more calm, and that he even appeared touched with his discourse. He

thought then that it would be best to leave him time to reflect, and also to give himself some moments of repose. Only he recommended the poor sufferer to have recourse to prayer, as the best remedy, when he felt himself moved to impatience; to address himself to Mary, the Mother of God, the Refuge of Sinners, and the Consolation of the Afflicted.

“Our poor artisan, left to himself, appeared absorbed in profound meditation. One thought had struck him, and remained fixed in the depth of his soul—it was this, ‘Blessed are those who suffer.’ Why, O my God, are they blessed? And he heard a voice within him saying, ‘Because Heaven is yours.’ Then he saw by the light of faith an immense eternity—torrents of joy—always joy. Then, by the side of this unspeakable happiness, this life of suffering on earth appeared to him as an imperceptible point.

“He was delightfully occupied with these reflections, when the parish priest came to bring him the consoling news that his wife and children had found shelter and protection in the house of a charitable lady, who had undertaken to feed and clothe them, and to provide for all their wants; that he himself would see to the education of the three youngest of the children; and as for the two others who were able to work, he would get employment for one in a house of business and for the other in a respectable shop; he had no need,

therefore, to feel any anxiety about his family, for Divine Providence had provided for them with the most paternal love. 'And now, my dear Anthony,' said the good pastor, 'think only of giving yourself up to this God of goodness, who has afflicted you only to call you to Himself.' 'Ah, reverend father,' said the poor artisan, quite moved, 'I devote myself entirely to Him; I have found here an angel of peace—this good, old man—who has just saved me from despair and death. Oh! even if my children had not found shelter and protection, I should not have failed to cast myself into the arms of so good a God, and to hope for everything from His tenderness. I have come to know Him, reverend father; this God is a Father who chastises His children only to save them. Be thou eternally blessed, O my God! and pardon my impatience and my blasphemies.'

"Anthony begged his pastor to hear his confession without delay. He made it with sentiments of the most heartfelt repentance. The next day he received the Holy Communion. From that time till his death, though always suffering, he never ceased to give thanks to God, for having brought him back into the way of salvation and happiness."

IV.

THE BENEFITS OF GOD SHOULD INSPIRE US WITH
THE GREATEST CONFIDENCE.

1. BENEFITS have a marvellous effect on the heart of man, in arousing and securing his affections. They are the chains which bind and unite him to his benefactor. But who can speak worthily of the benefits of God? How can we give an idea of the immense multitude of gifts and favours which He has heaped upon us in our creation and preservation? How can we appreciate that infinite treasure of graces and blessings which He has lavished on us in the great work of our salvation? How can we raise ourselves high enough to contemplate the eternal glory which He has promised to His faithful servants? These are depths which the mind of man cannot penetrate. There is the abyss of the infinite greatness of God—the abyss of His infinite love, which leads Him to bestow the benefit on us—the almost infinite abyss of the littleness of man, who receives it—and the abyss of the infinite value of the benefit in itself. If we attempt to speak of the benefit of Creation—a benefit so little known, so little appreciated, and for which we return the Lord so little gratitude—we must acknowledge that man cannot comprehend all the excellence which this benefit includes. What an

honour it is, what a distinguished privilege, to have been created by the Hand of God ! If He had conferred upon us only the simplest and lowest condition of existence ; if He had made us only an atom, a grain of sand, it would always have been a great honour to us to have been the work of so great a Creator, and to hold anything of Him. He would then have raised you to a state infinitely more noble than that of your original condition ; since it is true that there is an infinite distance between nothingness and existence—between something and nothing. But to have given you the most noble of existences, in making you man ; to have united in you all that He had distributed among the rest of His creatures—existence, life, feeling—and, above all this, to have given you a spiritual and immortal soul, which He has honoured with the august title of His own image and likeness, ennobled by an intelligence and will, which raise you above all that He has created in the world of matter. These favours are indeed incomprehensible and infinite. What an excess of goodness is it on the part of God to be willing to descend almost to our nothingness ! what love, what tenderness, to wish to abase himself even to the dust of the earth, and to give us a body shaped by His own Divine hand ! See with what care and attention He labours at this work ! To make other creatures, a word is sufficient ; but in order to form man, He gives Himself entirely to the work. And

what a masterpiece has He not made ! With what profusion He has employed all the riches of nature in the creation of man ! What beauty in his face ! What majesty on his brow ! What vivacity in his eye ! What grace on his lips ! But what shall we say of his interior—what perfection, what order, what delightful economy !

2. On seeing the infinite goodness of God in creating you, can you still give way to so much anxiety about your state of suffering ? Your body is perhaps tormented by cruel pains ; but why trouble yourself so much, since all that you suffer is the work of that Paternal hand which made you ? A God who has taken such care in forming the members of your body—Who has exhausted, so to speak, the treasures of His wisdom and power to preserve them and nourish their growth—would He make these members suffer, would He consume them with pain, wear them out, destroy them by sickness or trouble of mind, if He did not see that this was for your advantage ? No longer occupy yourself then with your affliction ; endeavour to forget yourself, and to divert your mind and heart to the action of God, so full of love, who is labouring for your salvation, and who sends adversities to try you, and render you perfect and pleasing in His sight. Do not forget that God, in giving you a body so noble and so perfect, has honoured you with a great privilege, which raises you far above the animals, that are without understanding. “I

believe that my Redeemer liveth," said Job, "and in the last day I shall arise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin; and in my flesh I shall see my God, whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another." (Job xix. 25.) "O death! where is thy victory?" You let your prey be taken from you; man rises again from his ashes; he comes forth from the grave, and ascends in triumph to the abodes of glory, to live in the bosom of God, immortal, impassible, and eternally happy!

The privilege of immortality is undoubtedly a great one; but it only renders us superior to beings deprived of reason. In giving us a body, God has honoured us with a prerogative, which raises us, in a manner, above the angels, and becomes in their eyes an object of admiration and envy. How many heroic virtues can we practise, how many holy actions can we perform, in how many generous combats can we be engaged, of which the angels are not capable? Can they suffer as we can? Are they able to carry the glorious livery and the mortification of Jesus Christ in their bodies? Can they shed their blood, and give their lives for the glory of their Creator?

But the great and sublime prerogative with which God has vouchsafed to honour the human body, is to have united it to His Divinity. What a glory it is for man to have a God for his Brother, and one of the same nature as himself! O good-

ness unspeakable? The Word of God, the Son of the Eternal, has preferred my flesh to the nature of the angels. "The Word was made flesh." He takes this same flesh which He has given to me, and makes of it one Divine Person with Himself. He raises it even to the throne of His glory; He makes it an object of adoration to all the angels, and He wills that they should pay It the same honour as that which they render to the Divinity. You may say then, that by the mercy and goodness of God, you are raised, in the Person of Jesus Christ, above the heavenly spirits; that you are sitting on the throne of God, at the right hand of the Almighty. What an honour! What a dignity! What glory can be compared to this? Without doubt, this was enough, it was too much, for a mere creature. But what cannot infinite love effect, when it is united with infinite power? This God of infinite love is not satisfied till He has made those whom He loves, in a manner, as happy and as great as He is Himself.

This is why God was not content with exalting our human nature, by uniting it to His own Divinity; but He has willed to extend this distinguished power to each of us in particular. He wishes that we should each of us be united to Him, and that we should make but one person with Him. Hence it is that He feeds us with His own Body in the Holy Communion. He mingles His flesh with our flesh. He sows it on our soil; He sows His

flesh in the earth of our bodies, if I may so express myself, as a germ of that immortality which He promises us, when we receive His Body in the Holy Communion.

3. See the excess of God's love for us ! Have you ever thought of it ? And he has done all this for your body, and he has worked all these miracles for the glory of that body, which is perhaps the object of your continual fear and solicitude. O soul of little faith, why are you anxious whether you shall have wherewith to clothe and feed your body ; whether you will have remedies in case of illness ; whether you will have strength to enable you to work ? You are alarmed at the least pain your body experiences, and you will not venture to confide the care of it to a God who formed it Himself, who preserves it, and who has done everything for its happiness and glory ? You prefer to do an injustice to the Lord, by your distrust and your fearfulness, rather than to believe in His love, and to honour Him by your confidence ! How far are you from feeling as the Saints did, when you act in this manner ! St. Bruno passed whole days and nights in thanking God for His benefits. In the transport of his gratitude he used continually to say, " O infinite love, which I love and adore, and which I am unable to understand ! Who has obliged Thee to love me thus ? To treat man with such magnificence, as to vouchsafe to give him Thy heart ? " St. Ambrose felt his soul melt within him,

in feelings of gratitude, when he meditated on the single benefit of creation. He was in an ecstasy of love when he contemplated the Divine Majesty occupied in forming man's body. But what was his admiration when he considered the dignity of the soul, so exalted above the condition of the body by the nobleness of its origin, the grandeur of its destiny, and the likeness it has to its Creator?

St. Augustine, than whom a greater genius has rarely appeared upon earth, was wont to exclaim, "I know not what Thou hast bestowed upon me, O my God, in giving me a soul of this nature. It is a prodigy which Thou alone canst comprehend; and if I could conceive what it is, I should see clearly that, after Thyself, there is nothing greater, nothing more precious than my soul." God did not create our soul by shaping it with His hands, as He did the body; nor by His word, as He did the rest of the creation; but the Holy Scripture tells us that He created it by His breath, as by a deep and loving sigh from His heart, to teach us that He created it with an affection as great and as tender as if He had drawn it forth, so to speak, from His very heart.

"God breathed into his face the breath of life." These words announce a great truth; they seem to say, that our soul is a spirit, that God breathes into us, as a production, an operation of His heart. But what grandeur do we discover in this truth! Do we not see what a close union there is between our

soul and the Holy Spirit, who is also a production of the Heart and the Will of God! The Holy Ghost is a sacred sigh, a loving breath from the heart of God, which fills Him with an infinite joy in Himself; and our soul is a breath of love, or a loving sigh from the same heart, which gives Him joy exterior to Himself. So that between the Holy Ghost and my spirit there is an intimate relation; they are made, if I may so speak, the one for the other; they are united the one to the other; and they thus establish an admirable bond of union between the Creator and His creatures.

4. "O my soul," exclaims a holy Religious, "thou hast the glory of carrying in thyself the image and likeness of God; thou hast received the great honour of coming forth from His Bosom, like a sigh from His loving heart; how is it that thou dost not love a God, who hast loved thee with so great a predilection? How is it that thou dost not abandon thyself to the paternal guidance of His Providence? How is it that thou art still afraid to throw thyself into His arms, and to leave to Him for ever the care of thy body, desirous henceforth to be employed only in loving and praising Him, and to be consumed in the flames of Divine love? You are troubled when you are humbled, when assailed by importunate temptations, when you are tired by disinclination and weariness in prayer. You complain that you are abandoned by God, despised by creatures, tormented and worn out

with grief, overwhelmed with disgrace and humiliation ! Ah ! poor creature ! What do you fear ? Do you not know that in this apparent death you are living by the Spirit of God, you are united to His Divine love, you repose in His heart, as a child in its mother's bosom ?"

"What are you afraid of ?" once said a Roman Emperor to a pilot who was frightened at the storm. "Why do you fear ? You carry Cæsar." I can say the same to you, O my soul, why are you afraid ? You carry the Lord with you, the Emperor of the universe ; or rather it is He Himself by whom you are carried and sustained.

In these states of tribulation and distress, according to the counsel and example of Father Alvaras, let us cast ourselves blindfold into the arms of God, with the firm confidence that He will not withdraw them, to let us fall, but that He will receive us lovingly into those arms which have drawn us out of nothing, and were nailed to the Cross for our salvation. "As for me, O Lord," added this holy Religious, "I cast myself entirely into Thy heart, and I resign myself unreservedly to do whatever Thou wilt that I should do. Thou wilt not forget, O Lord, that I am Thy work. Thou wilt assist me to know and to do Thy holy will on all occasions ! I wish to be all thou wishest me to be ; I ask for neither more kindness nor less rigour ; neither more rest nor less labour ; neither more joy nor less affliction : I only wish for what Thou givest

me ! I do not wish to be treated otherwise than Thou wishest me to be treated. Dost Thou wish me to be ill ? I wish to be ill. Dost Thou wish me to die ? I wish it. Dost Thou wish me to be poor ? I consent to be poor. Dost Thou wish me to lose that person who is so dear to me ? I submit to the loss. I find nothing painful, O my God, in all Thy dispensations ; for they are directed with so much love and wisdom : that my greatest happiness is to see them accomplished in all their extent."

5. There is another of God's benefits in the order of nature, even more wonderful than that we have been considering, and that is, the benefit of preservation. Very few persons know how to appreciate the inestimable favour that God bestows on them, in preserving the being He has given them. It is, however, a truth of faith, that if God did not sustain us by His preserving power every instant of our existence, we should immediately fall back into the nothingness from which we came. At every instant of my life God renews the benefit of my creation, and gives me a fresh being. He gives me a new life as often as I draw my breath ; He gives it me with an infinite love ; and He busies Himself in preserving it for me, with all the tender solicitude which a father has for his children. What ingratitude it is not to be thankful for a benefit so singular and so constant !

Is it then because this benefit is common to us

with all the rest of mankind, because it continues always and without interruption, that we should attach less importance to it? Must God, for a time, deprive us of life, in order to make us value the favour He does us, in continually preserving it? Shall we oblige Him to do us harm, in order to make us more fully alive to the fact that He is always doing us good? If we were on the point of losing our sight, how many prayers should we offer to God that He would preserve it for us? and if He grants us this favour, what thanksgiving we should make Him! Why are we not continually thanking Him, since the benefit of preservation is continual, not only with regard to the eyes, but to all the other members of the body?

We think ourselves indebted to a doctor, when he preserves an organ for us, of which we were threatened the entire and perpetual loss; we manifest our liveliest gratitude towards him. Oh, that we showed equal gratitude towards God! Are we not threatened every moment with the loss of life, by the very condition of our nothingness? And this God of goodness continually preserves our life! Why, then, not manifest to Him the love and confidence He merits? The infant child caresses its mother, it acknowledges her kindness as much as it can, by its affection; it clings to her neck, it embraces her tenderly, and is unwilling to be separated from her. But we, thankless and ungrateful as we are, what do we do? We treat God with the

greatest indifference, that God who exhausts the riches of His mercy to do us good ! We refuse our confidence to a God who works prodigies every day, and every instant of the day, to gain our heart, and to inspire us with His love. We go still farther ; we express a contempt for God by our impatience, and our murmurs against His Providence. If some one held us by a single thread over an abyss, with the power to let us fall into it at any moment he wished, what should we do ? We should beseech him incessantly not to abandon us, and let us fall into it. Should we venture to offend him, to irritate him, to provoke him to anger by our insults ? Now, it is a fact, that God holds us thus suspended over an abyss, and what abyss ? The abyss of death, perhaps of hell, if we are in the state of mortal sin ; and yet He sustains us continually by a miracle of patience and mercy ; He preserves our life by an excess of goodness which ought to ravish our heart, if we were able to comprehend it !

The Holy Scripture has remarked that when Core, Dathan, and Abiron were precipitated alive into hell, and that the earth opened under their feet, to swallow them up, with their tents and their substance, it happened that their children, who were innocent of their crimes, remained suspended in the air over the frightful abyss caused by the opening of the earth. (Numbers xvi. 35, compared with xxvi. 10, 11.) “And there was a great miracle wrought, so that when Core perished, his sons did

not perish." The preservation of these children was considered a far greater prodigy than the dreadful punishment of their parents. If then it was a great miracle that these innocent children were held up by the hand of God over the abyss, is it not a miracle infinitely more astonishing, that this infinite goodness holds and sustains an immense number of the guilty, even in the very act of their crimes? At the sight of such great mercy, and of so marvellous a love, ought not your heart to melt with gratitude, and above all to be filled with the most lively and the most perfect confidence?

TEXTS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE, WHICH MAY SERVE
FOR POINTS OF MEDITATION, AND FOR EJACULATORY PRAYERS, FOR THOSE WHO WOULD BE
FATIGUED WITH UNINTERRUPTED READING.

1. THE eyes of the Lord behold all the earth, and give strength to those who with a perfect heart trust in Him. (2 Paralip. xvi. 9.)

2. The Lord is good, and giveth strength in the day of trouble, and knoweth them that hope in Him. (Nahum i. 7.)

3. None that trust in Him, fail in strength. (1 Mach. ii. 61.)

4. Be not Thou a terror unto me. Thou art my hope in the day of affliction. (Jerem. xvii. 17.)

5. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor. x. 13.)

6. He hath set me in dark places, as those that are dead for ever; He hath built against me round about, that I may not get out. He hath made my fetters heavy. (Lam. Jer. iii. 6, 7.)

7. And thou shalt say in that day: I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, for Thou wast angry with me. Thy wrath is turned away, and Thou hast comforted me. Behold, God is my Saviour. I will deal confidently, and will not fear. (Isaias xii. 1, 2.)

8. Shew forth Thy wonderful mercies. Thou hast saved them that trust in Thee. (Psalm xvi. 7.)

9. And now, what is my hope? is it not the Lord? (Psalm xxxviii. 8.)

10. I will look towards the Lord, I will wait for God my Saviour. My God will hear me. Rejoice not then, my enemy, over me, because I am fallen; I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light. (Mich. vii. 7, 8.)

11. The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to hell, and bringeth back again. (1 Kings ii. 6.)

12. See that I alone am, and there is no other God beside me. I will kill, and I will make to live. (Deut. xxxii. 30.)

13. Although He should kill me, I will trust in

Him ; but yet I will reprove my ways in His sight, and he shall be my Saviour. (Job xiii. 15.)

14. Though I shall walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me. (Psalm xxii. 4.)

15. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and He will save the humble of spirit. (Psalm xxxiii. 19.)

16. I am with him in tribulation. (Psalm xc. 15.) How this makes up and compensates for the indifference and hardness of men ! Let them neglect me,—let them forget me,—what does it matter ? If God is with me when I suffer, what have I to fear or to complain of ? Ought not the Lord to take the place of every thing else ? Is not His sweet presence enough to charm my solitude, and to alleviate all my sorrows ?

17. Happy is the man whose trust is in the name of the Lord, and who hath not had regard to vanities and lying follies. (Psalm xxxix. 5.) The Lord will fill him with a joy more pure and abundant, as He sees him deprived of human consolation.

18. For which cause I suffer these things ; but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed. (2 Tim. i. 12.)

19. I live now in the flesh ; now not I, but Christ liveth in me. I live in the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and delivered Himself for me. (Gal. ii. 20.)

20. But when he was now ready to die with the

stripes, he groaned and said : O Lord, who hast the holy knowledge, Thou knowest manifestly, that whereas I might be delivered from death, I suffer grievous pains in the body ; but in soul am well content to suffer these things, because I fear Thee. (2 Mach. vi. 30.) A painful illness which lasts for years, and which no remedy can cure, is a long martyrdom, it is a slow death, harder than that of criminals who expire on the wheel, whose life is preserved only to make them suffer more.

21. This is the state, O my God, in which You have put me. I am before You, as a victim immolated daily to Your glory. As it is written : " For Thy sake, we are put to death all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." (Rom. viii. 36.)

22. I die daily. (1 Cor. xiii. 31.) My life is like Your own, O my Saviour, a perpetual sacrifice.

23. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself ; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; therefore whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's. (Rom. xiv. 7.)

24. I am become as a beast of burden before Thee. I am always with Thee ! for what have I in heaven but Thee ? and besides Thee, what do I desire upon earth ? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever. (Ps. lxxii. 25.)

25. Ah, I will love You, O Lord, You who are my

strength in my infirmities. Yes, I will love You, in spite of all the evils You cause me to suffer ; and no affliction, no trials of mind or body, shall separate me from Your love. "For I am sure, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. viii. 37.)

26. The things of the world have become insipid to me ; nothing out of Thee gives me pleasure, the most agreeable conversations fatigue me ; worldly books, even of the most entertaining kind, weary me. I have no relish but for the things of God, and my pleasure is to meditate on the eternal truths, as far as my affliction permits me. "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord, with my heart lifted up to Him in the night, and I was not deceived. My soul refused to be comforted (with the world). I remembered God, and was delighted, and was exercised, and my spirit swooned away (with joy). I thought upon the days of old ; I had in my mind the eternal years. And I meditated in the night with my own heart, and I was exercised, and I swept my spirit." (Psalm lxxvi. 2.)

27. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable. (1 Cor. xv. 19.) But we have not here a lasting city, we seek one that is to come. (Heb. xiii. 14.)

28. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for

justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (St. Mark v. 10.)

29. "The sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." (Rom. viii. 18.) "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulations, worketh for us, above measure exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Thus we possess in our sufferings an assurance of our supreme happiness hereafter. Before a mother can give birth to a child, she must go through the pains of labour; but those sufferings only last a short time; and soon the joy of seeing her newborn infant amply compensates for all her pains. Thus it will be with us in our sufferings. What is a moment of sorrow in comparison with an eternity of glory?

30. Happy is the man who in this vale of tears leans upon You alone, O my God! and directs all his thoughts and desires towards heaven. All pain and sorrow lose their bitterness when they are regarded in the great light of eternity. There we shall taste of joys perfectly pure, we shall enjoy unchangeable and perfect health, and God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and dry up every source of sorrow for ever. (Apoc. xxi. 4.)

31. At the sight of this unspeakable happiness, of this eternal repose, of this glorious recompense, we ought to be overwhelmed with joy to see ourselves in afflictions and trials; that "the trial of our

faith and our virtue being much more precious," saith the Apostle, "than gold which is tried in the fire, may be found unto praise, and glory, and honour, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, when He shall come at the last day, to judge all the nations of the earth." (1 Peter i. 7.)

COLLOQUY WITH JESUS ABANDONED BY HIS FATHER.

"O JESUS, the true consoler of the afflicted, the only hope of those who are cast down, the faithful love of desolate souls, the strength of the weak, and the refuge of all who are in distress! Into what an abyss of sorrow do I see You plunged, forcing from You that plaintive cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" How is it that You break that silence You have so constantly kept with regard to Your own sufferings? What has become of that patience which nothing could overcome? Are You beginning to lose this patience, O my Saviour, and to give utterance to complaints and lamentations? Would You then become like unto me, who tremble at the sight of the least danger? who fancy myself in the depths of the ocean, as soon as a storm arises? who am without confidence, without steadiness of purpose, and, according to Your own words, "a man of little faith?"

O Divine Lamb, You have hitherto been so

gentle, so patient, so calm ; You have always concealed Your sorrows within Your own breast ; You have endured without murmur or resistance all the sufferings that man inflicted on You ; do You now begin to speak, to testify Your anguish, to break forth into sighs, and to complain to Your Father, in terms capable of softening the very rocks ? Whence comes this change, O Lord, unless it be that You have fallen into an abyss of sorrow and desolation, and that You stick fast in the mire of the deep, and that there is no sure standing ? (Psalm lxxviii. 1), and that Your Humanity can no longer sustain so total an abandonment ? O Jesus, the love and the life of my soul ! why can I not console You ? Why can I not share with You the sorrow You endure ? But You wish to fulfil Your own words, and tread the wine-press alone, deprived of all help, and of all consolation.

What shall I render to You, O my Divine Jesus, for all the blessings You bestow upon me ? How may I be able to correspond to the love You have for me ? For it is neither by necessity, nor by chance, that You are reduced to this marvellous solitude ; it is the result of Your own choice, and of Your love. If You had given them permission, the angels would have come to Your assistance, the stars would have fallen from heaven, the elements and all creatures would have united to defend and protect You. But love, which has become the master of Your heart, and of all Your actions, has

ordained it otherwise. It is Your love which has reduced You to this state of desolation, and has rendered You more sensible to my wants than to Your own suffering. You have reserved for Yourself alone this suffering, so little known and so terrible ; and You willed to suffer without any consolation, in order to merit for us the grace of being consoled when we have to suffer ; for You never abandon Your servants in the time of their tribulation, and You are never so near to them as when they think that they are forsaken. What would become of me, O my God, if You treated me differently ? Yet, are You obliged to prefer my wants to Your own repose ? Is it just that the Son of the living God should endure such a dreadful torment for the consolation of a slave ? You know, O Divine Jesus, Your greatness and my littleness ; and this vast difference between You and myself does not hinder You from sacrificing Yourself for my salvation ; not that You see anything in me that merits such a sacrifice, but because Your love for us is the sole motive for benefiting us. O generous and infinite love ! O constant and disinterested love ! to what an extreme degree of love have You been carried !

You accepted, O my Saviour, the abandonment to which Your Father reduced You, with entire submission to His Will. You sustained Your holy humanity, in this direful struggle ; but You deprived it of all the sweetness that You could have imparted to it, in order that it might suffer without

any consolation. You did not will that an angel from heaven should console You. You led Your Holy Mother to the foot of the Cross, in order that her sorrow might redouble Your own. You permitted the flight of Your Apostles, that they might neither assist nor defend You. You concealed Your infinite power, so that Your enemies seeing in You nothing but weakness, might crush You with impunity. You were fastened to the Cross as a robber, a seducer, a troubler of the public peace, as the most wicked of men, covered with wounds, suffering in every part of Your body, abandoned by every one, even by Your own Father !

O Jesus, the God of my heart, the joy of my soul, the consolation of the afflicted ! when I see You thus desolate, words fail me ; but I wish that I could expire with love at Your side, or at least show You the innermost recesses of my heart, that You might see if there is not something there to give You consolation. Since You are deprived of everything, O my God, may my love at least not be wanting ! Inflame, O Lord, this love so tepid and so sluggish, that it may make me feel what You suffer, and may fasten me to the Cross with You.

Is it possible that I dare complain when I am deprived of heavenly consolations, after seeing You in such utter desolation ? But, alas ! my love is so feeble, that when You refuse me Your consolations I forthwith think myself forgotten, rejected, and

abandoned by You, O my God ! and then, instead of seeking You more earnestly, I go in search of vain consolations among creatures. I withdraw from Your Cross ; I distrust Your goodness ; though I see that in Your abandonment You have recourse to Your Father, that You remain on the cross, and there suffer agonizing torments till all is consummated.

O Jesus, the light of my soul, enlighten my inward sight in the times of tribulation ; and since it is so profitable for me to suffer, have no regard to my complaints, or to my weakness. I entreat You, by Your abandonment, not indeed to deprive me of afflictions, but not to abandon me when I am afflicted, and teach me then to seek for You as my only consoler ; and deign then to sustain my faith, to strengthen my hope, and purify my love. In all my trials grant me the grace to acknowledge them as coming from Your Fatherly Hand, and not to wish for any consolation that does not come from You. Humble me, then, as it may please You, and do not console me, except to render me more capable of suffering, and of persevering in suffering even unto death. Since the graces I ask of You are the fruits of Your abandonment, make me to know that I am thereby strong when I am weak, and glorify Yourself in my misery. O my Jesus, the only refuge of my soul ! (Father Thomas of Jesus.) .

O Mary, who saw and felt the extreme desola-

tion of your beloved Son, come to my help, when you shall see me in my last struggle with death : and by the cruel abandonment of Jesus, obtain for me of the Eternal Father, the grace not to be abandoned, but to be succoured, consoled, and fortified by His Divine Spirit, in order that I may one day have the joy of blessing you, and of eternally glorifying with you the august and adorable Trinity.

St. Joseph, patron of the agonizing, pray for me at the hour of my death. Amen.

PART THE FIFTH.

OF THE PEACE OF THE SOUL IN AFFLICTIONS.

I.

PRECIOUS ADVANTAGES OF THE PEACE OF THE SOUL.

1. THE principal duty of a Christian consoler, is not precisely to remove from those who are afflicted the physical cause of their suffering, if such there be, for this will often be impossible ; but it is to endeavour to dry up the source of those interior troubles which ruin the strength of the body, as well as that of the soul. His object is to establish within them a spirit of peace and tranquillity, which will tend to appease their sufferings, and sustain them against sadness and discouragement. Such, it appears to me, is the important task he has to fulfil. Such is perhaps the only end he should propose to himself ; for peace of soul is the greatest happiness of man upon earth. With it, the evils of this life have nothing painful in them ; and without it, the joys of the world have no sweetness. This truth has been so clearly recog-

nized at all times, that the sages of antiquity made it the foundation of their doctrines. I may be permitted to quote a few passages from the Pagan philosophers on this subject. Not, however, that I would propose them to you as models, but that you may see what a generous soul can do, which is in peace, and the strength and energy it possesses, when desirous of bearing up against misfortune with fortitude. Epictetus gives the following advice to one of his disciples.*

“Let others do as they think right, let them act as they please, let them apply themselves to what they think best, to framing good syllogisms, to reasoning well, to saying wonderful things on every subject ; but as for yourself, let your whole study be to preserve your peace of mind, and to continue in peace, in the midst of the saddest contradictions. Yes, let others learn what they like, let them seek after riches and honours ; but as for yourself, learn to calm the emotions of your heart, to restrain the wanderings of your imagination ; learn how to die, how to be sick, how to suffer torments, how to be poor, and to bear injuries calmly and without trouble of mind.” (Lib. 2, Apud. Arrian. ch. i.)

“If you regard me as your master,” he says elsewhere, “know that all the drift and object of

* “Epictetus and Seneca were contemporaneous with Christianity. It is therefore most probable that they derived their doctrines from other sources than that of reason alone.”

my doctrine, is to make men tranquil, constant, always the same; men whom nothing disturbs, nothing fetters or captivates; men who have their mind and heart free, content, and happy, and who in all things, great or little, pleasing or vexatious, look only to God and to His will. . . . A philosopher ought to say of himself: 'I know of no evil that can happen to me on the part of creatures, there is no one who can rob me of what I possess, there is no misfortune that can trouble me.'" (Lib. 3. ch. xiii.)

Shall I quote for you another Pagan philosopher? "Let men do with me what they like," says Seneca,—"let them torment and persecute me, let them overwhelm me with misfortunes; let there not be an hour of the day in which they do not give me some cause for discontent,—nevertheless I shall not deem myself unhappy in the midst of the greatest miseries; I shall not consider myself unfortunate, though I find myself assailed and crushed by the greatest calamities, because I have gained this victory over my spirit, and I have firmly established it in that peaceful state, that I do not esteem any day an unhappy one, whatever may happen to me." (De Beatâ Vitâ. cap. xxv.)

2. These admirable maxims in the mouth of a pagan philosopher, it must be allowed, were only beautiful theories, recommended with much earnestness, but very seldom reduced to practice. Their peace was not the true peace of God, it was but a

cold indifference to suffering, a stoical insensibility arising from pride. Therefore, in great suffering, their strong minds were not slow to give the lie to their fine language, and to show by their trouble and by their weakness, all the vanity of their pompous doctrine.

Such is not the peace of the Christian, of which I am about to speak to you,—the only true and solid peace, because it is founded, not on nature, which is always frail and inconstant, but on the grace of Jesus Christ, on the immutable will of God, on God Himself. Is there any fear that such a foundation can fail? Doubtless there is none. Thus the Holy Gospel, wishing to give us an idea of the unspeakable firmness of a soul in peace, compares it to a house built upon an immoveable rock ; winds may blow, storms may rage ; in vain the impetuous torrents dash against its walls, and strive to sap the foundations, and to overthrow it ; the edifice resists every shock, and remains firm and unshaken. Thus it is with a soul in peace, in the midst of the most terrible reverses. Sickneses the most trying, the sharpest pains, the greatest losses, the most unexpected humiliations, may attack such a soul, and make it taste their bitterness, but their united violence can avail nothing against its interior peace. Built on the corner-stone, on Jesus Christ, this Divine peace cannot be shaken by any misfortune.

It is not certainly that this peaceful soul is in-

sensible to afflictions ; it feels them all,—but habitually raised, by faith, above itself, and always united to God, whose strength supports it,—it feels its sufferings, so to speak, in the inferior part only of the soul, and in the low region of the senses ; as to its superior part, which St. Francis of Sales calls the summit, or highest point of the mind, where it retires with its God in great trials, it always enjoys the most profound calm, the most perfect serenity, and, like the ark of Noah, it floats on the waters of tribulation, an utter stranger to the noise and tumult of the waves beneath it.

3. I think I have said enough to convince you, that in the state of affliction in which God has placed you, there is no interior disposition more precious, or more necessary for you to acquire, than the peace of the soul, the repose of all your powers and faculties, in an entire submission to the will of God. I wish, however, to convince you still more of this, by a consideration which will easily determine you to seek after this Divine peace, and according to the advice of the Royal Prophet, to make continual efforts to obtain it. “Seek after peace, and pursue it.” (Psalm xxxiii. 15.) It is the consideration that this interior peace is the essential condition that God imposes upon us, in order to communicate His gifts to us, and to enable us to enjoy the Divine Presence.

You know that God is the great consoler of the afflicted ; there is none on earth but God that can

give us true and solid consolation. It is for this reason that He is called in the Holy Scripture, "the God of all consolation," (2 Cor. i. 3,) to teach us that He alone can impart, to those who suffer, true comfort; and that, out of Him, there is no solid joy to be found, to alleviate their trials. It is He Who, from the beginning of the world, has consoled the just in their tribulations; it is He Who sustained the martyrs in the midst of their combats; and what strength cannot the great God give, when He vouchsafes to impart it to souls? How He raises them above nature; how He fills them with joy, even amidst the most frightful torments! Behold those intrepid soldiers of Christ, intoning their canticles of joy, in the midst of their tortures! See a St. Lawrence on his gridiron, a St. Catherine on the murderous wheel, a St. Ignatius in the amphitheatre, devoured by the lions. Have those generous martyrs of their Saviour changed their nature? Have they become insensible to bodily pain? No, but it is God Who is present in their souls; it is God Who consoles and strengthens them; it is God Who associates Himself with them in their trials, and Who Himself supports all the weight and rigour of them. I understand you. What a happiness to have God for a consoler, and in the midst of your torments to enjoy His ineffable communications! Yes, without doubt, what a happiness! But this happiness is attached to an essential condition, that is, the soul must be in peace.

"The Lord does not dwell where there is trouble," says the Royal Prophet. He does not dwell in an unquiet mind, in a heart always agitated, either by hope or fear. His spirit is very mild and sweet ; the least noise drives Him away. "His place is only in peace," according to the Royal Prophet. (Psalm lxxv. 3.) His dwelling is in a tranquil soul, which is mistress of its movements, free in its affections, always the same in itself, firm and constant in its resolutions ; it is in such a peaceful soul that He has promised to establish His abode, to fix His throne, and to pour out abundantly the treasures of His grace. And how could He do otherwise? God only comes into us to make us hear His word ; His word is His grace ; His word is His light ; it is the life with which He animates us, the fire which He kindles within us. But how can we hear this Divine word, this Divine voice? Amidst the confused noise of a multitude of wishes and fears? When the imagination is excited, filled with the most depressing and irritating images, dashing against one another like flashes of lightning coursing the clouds on a stormy night? No, you will not hear the word of God except you are in peace, and in solitude ; it is then that He will speak to your heart. Let it then be your great effort, and your habitual occupation, to calm the agitation of your mind, to repress all the passionate emotions of your heart, to restrain the wanderings of your imaginations, and thus to give repose to

your soul. Then you will enjoy the presence of God. He will come to you, or rather He will re-appear, as the sun re-appears after a storm, and when the clouds are dispersed, you will again feel the Divine influence of this Sun of Justice. The consolations of a God of peace and love will come, like the visit of a kind friend, to lessen the severity of your trial. The amiable conversations of our Heavenly Father, the ineffable communications of the Saviour Jesus, of this tender friend of those who suffer, will fill you with joy in the midst of your afflictions, and you will experience the truth of those words of St. Paul, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also, by Christ, doth our comfort abound." (1 Cor. i. 5.) This is what the saints have found ; and this is the reason why those directors, who are the most experienced in the ways of God, have always recommended to those who suffer, nothing so much as interior peace ; assuring them that they will find in that peace all the strength necessary for their state, and a never-failing source of joys and consolations.

4. Let us hear what the holy Bishop of Geneva says on this subject. To one of his nuns who was ill he writes as follows :—" You must above all things, my dear sister, maintain tranquillity of mind in the midst of your sufferings, not because it is the mother of content, and procures numerous consolations for you, but because it is the daughter of the love of God, and of the resignation of our own will.

Since my return from visiting my diocese, I have had an attack of fever. The doctor would prescribe for me no other remedy than rest, and I have obeyed him. You know it is the remedy that I myself gladly prescribe for my spiritual patients, this repose of the soul ; and I always interdict all over-eagerness and trouble of mind. This is why in this repose of my body, I thought of the spiritual repose which our hearts ought to take in the will of God, in whatever direction that will may lead us. Let us live, as long as it may please God, in this valley of tears, with an entire submission to the will of God.

“I was thinking the other day of what is said of the halcyon, the little bird that lays its eggs in the roadsteads of the sea. It makes its nest round, and so closely compacted, that the sea-water cannot penetrate it ; but at the top there is a little aperture, through which it can breathe. It is in these little nests that the halcyon deposits its young ones ; so that in rough weather they may float on the waves in safety, without fear of the water entering. The air admitted through the little opening serves as a counterpoise, and balances the little bark so well, that it never upsets. Oh, how I wish you would build this nest in the depth of your heart, where you would be safe in all the tempests of temptation, and the tossing waves of the sufferings of this life ! How I desire that your soul might be always enclosed in it, and find shelter

there in all your trials, a calm shelter which no trouble or vexation could ever penetrate ! Admire the goodness of God in these halcyons : while these birds are building their nests, and their young ones are still too tender to bear the pressure of the waves, and to resist their violence, our Heavenly Father vouchsafes to take care of them, and watches over them with such solicitude, that He hinders the waves from carrying them away, and doing them any harm. Oh, what great repose we ought to find in the Hands of so good a Father ! Oh, may this sovereign goodness make the nest of our hearts safe and secure ; and may it kindle in those hearts the fire of His love ! Oh, how I love these birds, that are surrounded by the waters, and that live only on the air ! they hide themselves in the sea, and see nothing but the sky ! And what pleases me still more is, that the anchor is cast from above, and not from below, to strengthen them against the violence of the waves. May the sweet Jesus give us the grace, that though surrounded by the waters of tribulation, we may live in the air, that is, by His Spirit ; that amid the miseries of humanity, we may always aspire and look up to Heaven ! And may the anchor of our hopes be always cast on high, and fixed on Paradise !”

From these words of St. Francis of Sales, you may form a just idea of what constitutes the true peace of the soul ; for there are many who are misled in this important matter. They imagine that

they enjoy a holy peace of mind, when in their interior they taste the sweetness of a certain repose wherein nothing troubles them ; when they experience no temptation, when no one contradicts them, when they are in perfect health, and when whatever they undertake succeeds according to their wishes. They rest with great satisfaction in this exquisite peace, which flatters them, and their self-love is nourished, so to speak, by this interior sweetness ; and their heart, becoming attached by this secret tie, soon loses its liberty, and becomes, almost without knowing it, the slave of its affections. But wait till some trial comes, and then you will see that this pretended peace is an illusion, founded on the shifting sands of a passing and sensible consolation. Do not, therefore, mistake the matter ; do not rely on this illusory sentiment of sweetness. "The true, the solid, and unchanging peace, is not founded on flesh and blood," says a pious author, "but its reign is in the pure spirit, in the superior part of our soul, even when in the inferior part there may be war and tempests." Yes, this peace reigns in the midst of humiliations, of sharp pains, and opposition on every side. If it were not so, if the peace of the soul could not ally itself with adversities, how could the saints have had it, amidst the temptations and trials of this sorrowful life ? How could holy Job, that prince of the unfortunate, how could he have been able to intone his hymn of thanksgiving, at the moment

when he was assailed and overwhelmed by such great afflictions? Let us listen to the touching recital of his sufferings, and we shall be astonished that amid so many and such heavy afflictions, he was able to preserve such peace of mind and such admirable tranquillity of soul. "As the servant longeth for the shade, as a hireling looketh for the end of his work, so also I have had empty months, and I have numbered to myself wearisome nights. If I lie down to sleep, I shall say, when shall I rise? and again I shall look for the evening, and I shall be filled with sorrows even till darkness. My flesh is clothed with rottenness, and the defilement of dust; my skin is withered and drawn together. If I say my bed shall comfort me, and I shall be relieved speaking with myself, then on my couch Thou wilt frighten me with dreams, and terrify me with visions." (Job vii. 2.)

What a state of desolation and misery is here described! Yet what peace, what repose of mind, does this model of the afflicted preserve in the midst of his trials! For it is holy Job who, under the most unforeseen and terrible calamities, has made his exclamation of faith and love resound through the whole world: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job i. 21.) If it is He who wounds, it is He also who heals; and though He would slay me, yet I would trust in His goodness. O my God,

grant me this consolation, that You will not spare me in this life ; consume me with pains, I shall be content, provided there never escapes from me a single murmur against Your providence, and that I in no way oppose Your orders and dispensations, which are always just and most holy !

It is evident, then, that the peace of the soul is not incompatible with the trials of this life; on the contrary, they strengthen and guarantee its stability. For we cannot be assured that we possess a solid and constant peace, unless we have been able to preserve it under great trials. We shall prove the truth of this, and conclude this reading, by the history of those unhappy victims who were exiled in 1798, and were left to perish in the frightful deserts of Conomana. We should have been left in ignorance of the cruel martyrdom they had to endure, if a good priest, himself a victim of the persecution, had not transmitted the account of it, in a long letter which he sent before his death to his father. The letter reached France without the signature of the author, and even without any address, a precaution it was then necessary to take, that no families might be compromised. The letter is as follows :—

5. “ You are longing to know, my good father, what has become of your son since you saw him violently torn from his parish, and dragged to the prisons at Rochefort, for the cause of religion. I was first thrown into one dungeon and then into

another, loaded with fetters, and my cup filled with bitterness. But I thought myself very happy to wear the holy livery of my Saviour, and to share the lot of the virtuous ecclesiastics, whose example strengthened my courage and taught me how to suffer. . . . The dungeon in which I was imprisoned already contained eight ministers of religion, and with them all the virtues. . . . It was night when I entered this gloomy abode, one solitary lamp shed around it its sepulchral glimmer. What a spectacle ! Those venerable old men, those angels of the earth, were stretched on the ground ; they had only a little straw whereon to lay their heads, whitened by age and their apostolic labours, . . . and yet they were all asleep. . . . Innocence so soon falls asleep !

“My eyes were soon fixed involuntarily on one of those aged sufferers, whose heavenly countenance commanded my veneration. On seeing him, seized with a holy respect, I approached him, I fell on my knees by his side, and I promised God to consecrate my services to the old age of this venerable octogenarian He wakes up, perceives me, lifts his eyes to heaven, and then reaches me his hand. ‘O my son,’ he says to me, ‘you also are the child of the Lord ! “Whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth, and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” May faith support you in persecution, and may God be always your peace and your comfort !’ His companions in misfortune,

having woke up, joined him in his prayers and good wishes, and came around me. They forgot their own afflictions, to occupy themselves with mine! I appear to be the only victim! I am the only one whom they console ‘Ministers of Jesus Christ,’ I exclaimed, ‘O my fathers and my models, may God give me the strength which animates you! may my sins be expiated by long sufferings! May my faith be purified in tribulation, may my hope grow strong in sufferings, and may I, by imitating you, merit the crown of the just, which awaits you in Heaven!’

“Two days after my arrival, we were taken from prison, and put on board the vessel which was to transport us to Guiana. Ecclesiastics from all parts of France, many of whom were sixty years of age, were crowded together in the frigate, *La Charente*. One good old man, worn out with infirmities, could hardly walk,—another of my companions, tormented by fever, had but a few days to live,—several sank under the weight of years. In vain some voices were raised on behalf of these unhappy victims of the Revolution. ‘You can present your petition when you reach Cayenne,’ was the reply My dear father, the sick, the aged, crowded together, stretched on the boards, devoured with vermin, without linen, without clothing, worse fed than convicts,—such is the heart-rending spectacle presented by these venerable exiles! The only air they breathe is supplied

through a narrow valve,—the bad air spreads contagion,—there is an odour of death in this burning furnace; the sentries posted to guard us are themselves affected by it, so that they can no longer discharge their duty. It is a real tomb. The officer who was ordered to lead us back every evening to this infected place, startles us by shouting in our ears that revolutionary phrase: ‘Tyrrants, down into your coffin!’

“What a martyrdom we suffered during those frightful nights! and yet no one is heard to utter the least murmur! All possess the courage which innocence alone can give,—all have learnt to suffer, and to keep their soul in peace and patience. The crew of the vessel contemplate these heroic victims with astonishment. Many of the sailors shed tears in secret over our misfortunes, and they were kindly disposed to lessen our sufferings.

“We disembark at Cayenne. All the exiles are divided into two classes; some leave for Sinamary, and the rest, with myself among them, are destined for the frightful deserts of Conomana. We are put on board a schooner, and during a passage of more than seventy miles, we had no other drink to quench our thirst than the sea water. We landed, but not to get any rest,—nine long and weary miles remain for us to go on foot, carrying our knapsacks all the way, before we reach our last and fatal abode, at Conomana. We are dying of thirst, and all that we find to relieve our suffering

is the brackish water of a river, on the banks of which we are obliged to lie down to get a few drops of it to drink. We asked the officer who was conducting us for some relief, and this ferocious man replied: 'Hold your tongues, you banished dogs, or I will silence you by shooting you dead.'

"At length we reached a wild and barren spot, where we were almost all to perish. They gave us a hut to live in, on which the burning rays of the summer sun fell perpendicularly, and so heated the ground that it gave it a red colour, as if it were on fire. From this burning soil there rose continually a pestilential vapour, which infected the air, and consumed the bodily strength. In the evening, when the sun had ceased to torment us, and when we expected to breathe more freely, a new kind of trial came to deprive us of this little hope. We were attacked by swarms of venomous insects, whose painful bites covered the body with purulent blisters The roofs, under which we had to pass the night, consisted of one poor cabin only, called the hospital; and some still more miserable huts, where we had nothing but dry leaves for roof and walls.

"What a life! O father, what a cruel fate! But what am I saying? Forgive me for making use of language so entirely human, and unworthy of a Christian. Faith teaches us that sufferings are the way to Heaven, the glory of the Saints, and the pledge of predestination. The sight of a God sacri-

ficed for our love supported us, and preserved us in peace and in consolation. We said to one another, as formerly the confessors did, of whom St. Cyprian speaks, who were condemned to work in the mines: 'Our bodies sink under the weight of fatigue, and we have only the earth for our bed; but is there any difficulty in sharing the fate of Jesus Christ? . . . These bodies are impregnated with mire, and with poison, but interiorly the spirit purifies the stains and the corruptions of the body. We have but little food, and that of an unwholesome kind, but the Christian "does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." We have no clothing but rags, but these rags are the glorious livery of Jesus Christ.'

"Such were the pious conversations by which we consoled each other in the midst of our sufferings.

"We had only passed one night in this deadly dwelling, my dear father, when the next day we could scarcely recognize one another, so greatly were we changed in this horrid locality. We wandered about like spectres, our Breviaries in our hands, not knowing whither we were going One of our companions, in a fit of delirium, caused by a violent fever, has already thrown himself into a river, to quench the fire that consumed him. Alas! his body was not found till four days afterwards, and made us comprehend that the cemetery was the only habitation he needed A fortnight had scarcely elapsed before the hospital and

the wretched huts were filled with the sick. Their nails fell off their fingers, their legs and the other members of their bodies were swollen, and covered with sores; worms had so accumulated in some, that the flesh fell off in large pieces; others were so weakened by dysentery, that they had not strength to move from where they were. It required an heroic charity to wait on them, so offensive was the odour which came from their bodies, already in process of dissolution. But this heroic charity was not wanting. My dear father, it was a spectacle worthy of the admiration both of Heaven and earth! What magnanimity was displayed in those who sacrificed themselves for their brethren! What patience in those virtuous priests, in those venerable old men! What meekness, what resignation, what peace, in such extreme suffering! Out of the eight ecclesiastics whom I found in the prison at Rochefort, only two now remain alive. The good old priest, at whose feet I then knelt, has just departed this life. The grave of this just man is often watered with our tears An hour before he breathed his last, this holy confessor of the Faith, notwithstanding all I could do to prevent him, would drag himself to the middle of the hut, and prostrate on the ground, and surrounded by his suffering brethren, or rather encircled by languishing spectres, he received from my hands the last spiritual helps of the Church, and then said to us all :

“ ‘ My brethren in Jesus Christ, the pains I have suffered are nothing, when compared to the sufferings of a God drenched with gall and vinegar, and dying upon a cross . . . Let us die, as the Apostle tells us, with the hope that we are going to be introduced into the holy city of Heaven . . . Let us die with the hope that our tribulations, which are momentary, are about to crown us with an “ eternal weight of glory.” Let us die with the confidence that Jesus Christ will one day change our vile and abject body into a body brilliant with splendour ! Before we die, let us pray for our persecutors . . . ’ He ceased to speak ; I began to recite the prayers of the agonizing, but his hand, which was clasped in mine, soon became as cold as ice. He expired in my arms.

“ Every day there are fresh losses, one victim is followed by another. The one whom death may strike in three days hence, perhaps to-morrow, joyfully digs the grave to-day which is soon to cover him. The grave is the term of our desires, and the one about to descend into it only sheds tears for those who survive him.

“ For all of us, the cemetery is the end of our walk, whither we continually direct our steps ; it is the place of our meeting. . . . It is there we love to make choice of a spot, where we hope to find our rest. Mutual friends mark out the ground where they may lie, side by side, each stretched in his grave ; they would not be separated, even in death.

. . . . The grave which each one digs with his own hands, destined for his own mortal remains, becomes his hope.

“By making an exact calculation, it is very probable that out of one hundred and ninety-three of these victims of the Revolution, there will not be ten left in five months hence. Your son, then, will not perhaps be living. This idea has nothing in it to torment him ; he dwells on it without terror ; and the hope that his soul, purified by misfortune, will be worthy to appear before the tribunal of God, fills him with consolation, and sustains him against the future.

“O father, how sweet it is to die, at the close of a career of suffering and tribulation !

“Farewell, my good father ! may the Lord protect your old age, and give you a happy end in His grace ! I conclude by asking your blessing, and the help of your prayers.”

II.

THE MEANS OF PRESERVING THE PEACE OF THE SOUL IN AFFLICTIONS.

1. IN speaking of the evils of this life, the famous Epictetus, a Pagan philosopher, makes an observation most worthy of your consideration. “What

tries us," he says, "what gives us pain and trouble of mind, is not so much the evils we suffer, as the opinion we have of them ; it is not so much the suffering which takes away our peace, as the mistaken judgment we form of it. In fact, if our mind was quite healthy, if our reason was well enlightened, and our heart detached from those earthly affections which fill us with darkness, we should look upon what happens with a different eye from what we do at present ; we should have a far juster notion of sufferings, and of trials, than we have now. Why ? Because we should consider them from their true point of view ; we should not judge of them by their outward appearance, or by what only strikes the senses, and passes away ; but we should regard them according to the maxims of sound reason, enlightened by faith, in their principle, and in their end. And thus our judgment, being always conformable to the truth, would enable us to avoid all error, and would destroy within us the source of our disquietude, of our fears and our vexations. If we look at an object through a transparency, or through a coloured glass, it will convey to our eye the colour of the glass ; and if we judge by this false appearance we shall be deceived. What must we do, then, in order not to be mistaken ? We must take away the glass, or at least remove its colouring, and then we shall see the object in the clear light of day, such as it really is in itself."

Thus it is with the judgments we form of sufferings, of afflictions, of sicknesses, and the humiliations that happen to us. If we look at them through the coloured medium of our false notions, which obscure our intellect, we shall form a very wrong judgment of them ; they will appear to us something frightful, and will occasion us numberless troubles. Let us purify our mind from its errors, let us disengage our imagination from its false notions, let us regard afflictions in the light of faith. Oh, what a difference will there then be ! What bright rays of truth will at once open our eyes, and show us entrancing beauties, where just before we had seen nothing but horrors ?

Why is it that we remark so great a difference between the thoughts and sentiments of a just man who lives by faith, and those of the mere animal man, who has no ideas or conceptions but of the things of sense ? Whence is it that the one regards afflictions as the most signal favour that God can bestow upon him, and that the other flies from them as the greatest of evils ? Why does the one fall into despair at the least misfortune, and the other is so calm and joyful in the greatest reverses ? The worldly and sensual man fears injuries, and is in distress of mind if poverty comes upon him ; yet St. Paul welcomes and embraces all these miseries as his most dear delight ! There is also an extreme difference between the judgments we form at one time and those we form at another.

At one time a St. Francis Xavier sighs after the glory of the world and a brilliant reputation ; it is a folly, he thinks, for him to pass his days in the obscurity of the religious life ; and at another he abhors the vain honours of the earth, and he embraces the humiliations and the Cross of Jesus Christ. Whence comes this great change ? Are the realities of things altered ? Not at all ; but it is the mind of the man which is changed ; he has received other lights ; he has been enlightened by the illumination of the faith, and his errors have been dispelled, as darkness is scattered by the light of day ; he has seen the truth.

2. But in order to have a holy esteem for sufferings, and not to be troubled on account of them, it is not sufficient to purify the understanding from its errors, we must also cleanse the heart from its passions. Nothing so blinds and troubles us as vicious affections. They cause in the soul what black vapours occasion in the air, they darken and intercept the light of the sun. "An irregular passion," says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "is a tyrant which enchains our soul, and thrusts it into a dark dungeon, where it can see nothing, and where everything makes it afraid. Great and noble hearts, on the contrary, who, by the grace of God, know how to free themselves from their passions, by mortifying the impetuosity of their senses, always walk in the light, and enjoy a profound peace. The great secret of obtaining peace," continues the

same Father, "is not to have any passionate attachment to any object whatever, but to be able to deprive ourselves of what we wish for ; for if the heart sighs after any object, from that moment it loses its tranquillity ; it will be alternately tormented by the desire of possessing it, or by the fear of losing it. Take away the winds from the sea, and you will prevent all tempests ; in the same way, take from the heart all its impetuous desires, all its excessive fears, and you will free it from all those troubles and agitations which, like storms, continually disturb and unsettle it." "Our life," says Seneca, "is a real folly ; we allow ourselves to be led astray, like the blind, by the desire of what can only do us harm, or at least, of what is incapable of satisfying us. The sick man is eager to be cured, the convalescent is anxious for perfect health ; the poor man cannot live on in indigence ; all make themselves unhappy by their own will ; for Divine Providence, Who wishes to sanctify them by patience, not always heeding their unwise prayers, they abandon themselves to murmuring, and their life is consumed in vexation and wretchedness." "There is no man more unfortunate than the one who follows the impulse of his passions," says the celebrated Aristotle ; "and there is no one more happy than the virtuous man who is guided by the light of reason. Hence our great object, as rational creatures," adds this Pagan philosopher, "and the noblest end we can propose to ourselves, is never

to give way to the inclinations and dispositions of the inferior part of the soul, which is essentially animal, but to regulate our whole conduct by the maxims of wisdom." As regards ourselves as Christians we will say in addition, that we ought to be guided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Who teaches us that in order to keep ourselves in peace, we must be patient in our afflictions ; that if we would be His disciples, we must renounce ourselves, subdue our appetites, and do violence to our natural inclinations. For to yield to the bad propensities of our hearts, is a punishment more terrible than to be abandoned to the fury of lions and tigers.

3. There is, besides, a faculty of our soul, which causes us many troubles and vexations—I mean that of the imagination. It is a power exceedingly susceptible of emotions, and it is of the greatest importance to calm and regulate it, if we would not become its victims.

A weak imagination, which is easily impressed, and alarmed at the slightest object, causes more harm to one that is sick, or to any other person in affliction, than the malady itself of which he complains ; it irritates the humours, heats the blood, and renders a cure almost impossible. But it is principally in the soul that this capricious faculty causes such ravage, by agitating it with numberless phantoms. A mere fancy, a shadow, an imaginary evil, will be able to alarm us, and make as much impression on us, as a hideous mask makes on

children, or a scarecrow upon birds. Unjust minds, says an ancient philosopher, and characters that are light and impressionable, are easily seized with panics and fears, and become frightened in foolish and ridiculous matters. A red colour irritates the bull, the asp darts forward at a mere shadow, and a piece of linen waved before a lion is enough to throw him into a fury. It is exactly so with imaginative people ; a slight appearance, a mere suspicion, the idea of some fancied evil, is sufficient to terrify them and upset their judgment. If they are ever so little indisposed, if their sleep has been interrupted, if their digestion has not been so good as usual—if they have, or fancy they have, a slight headache—then these imaginative people become troubled and almost speechless.

They are alarmed, they anxiously seek for remedies, they are uneasy as to what may be the result ; they become dull, melancholy, vexed, and annoyed with everybody. These dispositions of mind, far from being any benefit to their sickness, render it more serious, and even in many cases incurable. Hence, in such cases, doctors have no better remedy to prescribe than repose of mind and the calm of the imagination.

St. Teresa gives excellent advice to her religious on this subject. It is a great and dangerous temptation, she says, or the result of an ill-regulated imagination,—on experiencing some slight indisposition,—to be so anxious about medicines and

the means of recovering one's health. I have learnt by experience that the less we think of our health, the better we are. Some among you, my dear daughters in Jesus Christ, seem to have entered Religion for no other reason than to take care of your body and prevent it from dying. Oh ! what blindness ! what a deplorable delusion ! On the contrary, have you not come here to die to yourselves, in order to live to your Saviour ? And when is it that you will have an opportunity of practising patience, if you cannot bear a slight indisposition without throwing yourself on the bed and fatiguing the whole community with waiting upon you ? Call to mind, then, our holy founders, our first models, whose life it is your aim to imitate ; see them in wild deserts, a prey to every inconvenience, and to all kinds of suffering. Had they, as you have, all that was necessary for their subsistence ? Had they fire, food, and clothing just as they wanted them ? Ah ! no ; it was by the sweat of their brow that they had to procure for themselves a few herbs to sustain life. All their recourse was to prayer, to patience, and to the expectation of another life. It is necessary, my dear sisters, that this same spirit should animate you also : you must forget your body, forget your health, forget yourselves,—and you must lose your life, as Jesus Christ tells us, if you wish to find it. There is no perfection, not even salvation, without this disposition of heart. And what

does it matter, after all, if we should die? What does it matter if this body perishes, if the soul lives. This mass of flesh, this great enemy of our happiness, has too long lorded it over us—too long have we been its slaves. It is time to have the laugh on our side, and to make it pay for the degrading passions to which it has subjected us, by mortification, sickness, and suffering.”

St. Bernard has a passage still more remarkable, when speaking to his Religious on those words of the Gospel: “Whosoever does not renounce himself, and carry his cross, cannot be My disciple.” What say you to that, my brethren—you who are so solicitous about your food, and so little concerned for your perfection,—who take so much care about the health of your body, and so little of the salvation of your soul,—who prefer to infringe all the rules of the monastery rather than omit the slightest injunction of the doctor? What maxims, then, do you wish to follow? Is it the doctrine of Jesus Christ, or that of Hippocrates, that you wish to profess? Doubtless the Religious who demurs about the food which is given him—who finds it either unwholesome, or badly cooked — shows clearly enough which master he has chosen. That Religious is not the disciple of the Saviour, who is continually remarking: “This diet gives me a headache, that does not suit my chest, that other food is too heavy for my stomach; water weakens my body, wine heats my blood, milk gives me the

heartburn ; those vegetables give me the colic—with a thousand similar observations. No ! such is not the language of a Religious, nor even that of a Christian. What, then, shall we do for you, my dear brother ? What food shall we give you, if you find nothing you can eat ? Where have you read of these nice distinctions ? Is it in the Gospel or in Epicurus ? No, assuredly ; it is not the Spirit of God, but flesh and blood which have revealed to you this carnal wisdom. Now, consider it well, the wisdom of the flesh is death—the wisdom of the flesh is the enemy of God—and by following such a guide, you lose both soul and body for all eternity.”

It is thus that the holy Doctor displayed his zeal for religious discipline, when he saw it endangered by those brethren, who were so easily seduced by the caprices of their imaginations. By repressing the wanderings of this excitable faculty, he not only restored order and discipline in his monastery, but he brought calm and peace to those unquiet and troubled souls. The counsel of the pagan philosopher, Seneca, is then very wise, when he says : “ That the great means of procuring tranquillity of mind, is to cure our imagination.”

But I cannot refrain from translating a letter, which this same philosopher addressed to his friend Lucilius. “ There are three things, my dear Lucilius, in every sickness, which give us anxiety ; the fear of death, the pains of the body, and the privation

of pleasures. As to the first, the general remedy for all the evils of this life, as well as for all the infirmities of the body, is the contempt of death. But why should I say contempt? Ought I not rather to say, the desire of death, since for a virtuous man, death is the passage to a better life? As to the sufferings which accompany sickness, we must acknowledge that they are sometimes very great; but the rest and intermission, which they give us from our ordinary duties and occupations, render them supportable. Besides, a generous and prudent man keeps his mind at a distance from his body, and converses as often as he can with the most noble part of his nature: as to his inferior part, this house of clay, so gross and so animal, he leaves it to complain as it may, and has no communication with it, but what may be strictly necessary. All pain is light, my dear Lucilius, when our imagination does not increase it. If you try to master yourself, and to say, 'This affliction is nothing, or at least a slight affair; let us have a little patience, it will soon be over;' you will soon see that your suffering will not be half so great, by persuading yourself that it is but a trifle. It is also very useful to distract your mind from the thought of your trial, and to lead it in another direction; to think of the courageous actions you have performed in past days; to recall to memory the famous personages who have triumphed over pain. Admire, for instance, the heroism of the man who continued to read a book,

while his leg was being cut off; and of another, who only laughed when the irritated executioners inflicted the most horrible torments on his body. Shall they then, who were as weak as yourself, be able to triumph over pain with a laugh, and shall you not be able to do so by an act of your intelligence, by the faculty of your reason? There remains a third matter," continues Seneca, "which afflicts us in our sickness; it is the privation of pleasures. There are two sorts of pleasure; the one relates to the body, the other to the mind. As to the former, sickness does not deprive us of them, but it hinders us from relishing them; or rather, if I am not mistaken, sickness makes us eagerly desire them. Is there not more pleasure in eating when we are hungry, and in drinking when we are thirsty, than when one is neither hungry nor thirsty? Do we not find our food more pleasant when we have been some time without eating? As to the pleasures of the mind, which are greater and more solid, there is no doctor whatever who would refuse them to the sick. Whoever knows what these pleasures are, and seeks them, will easily despise the satisfaction of the senses, and will find in them a real alleviation in his suffering."

Such is the doctrine of this pagan philosopher. Although it breathes very little of the spirit of Christianity, yet you may make use, with advantage, of the means he points out, for lessening your sufferings. The example of these pagans, who,

without the graces of Christianity, endured their pains with such magnanimity, makes more impression, on some minds, than the most heroic acts of the martyrs.

4. But the shortest and the surest way to obtain peace of mind, as it is also the most powerful motive to make us love it, is the beautiful virtue of humility; a virtue so far from the thought of man, that before the time of our Saviour, it was unknown; and it was necessary that our Lord should come Himself to teach it us, saying: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls." Humility fills our understanding with Divine lights, and leads us to perfection; for "where there is humility," saith the Holy Spirit, "there also is wisdom." On the contrary, "where there is pride, there also is darkness and vexation." This is why our Lord Jesus Christ addresses these words to His Father: "I give You thanks, O Father! that You have hidden these things,—that is, the understanding of Your mysteries,—from the wise and prudent, puffed up with the opinion of their own wisdom, and that You have revealed them to little ones, that is to the simple and humble." "If you see," says St. John Climachus, "that any one has reached a high degree of sanctity, and great tranquillity of mind, in a short time, be assured that he has gained it by the happy path of humility." The pious Rusbrock, in his treatise on the spiritual life, assures us that this

virtue enriches us with an inestimable treasure, and with a most precious gift, that of banishing from our hearts all sadness, and all displeasure, by establishing us in a solid peace, and an unspeakable content.

“No,” adds this great teacher, “I am not afraid of saying it, if we do not suffer our afflictions with patience, it is through want of true humility. Because the man who is humble, knowing that by his sins he has made himself unworthy of God’s benefits, and has merited His anger, and the contempt of all creatures, never finds the pains he endures are too great ; on the contrary, he finds them far less than his sins deserve. He never complains of any one, and whatever insult he receives, or whatever injury is done to him, he thinks that he is treated too kindly. He offers no resistance to the Will of God, or to the designs He has in his regard ; in fact, it is in resistance to that Divine Will that all our disquiet originates. Thus, he everywhere, and always, enjoys profound peace.”

St. Francis Borgia was accustomed to say, that he had three rooms that he could retire to, when agitated in mind, and where he could taste, in perfect solitude, the sweetness of repose. The first was that of his nothingness ; the second was that of his sins ; and the third was that of hell, where he placed himself under the feet of the devil, humbling himself profoundly, and acknowledging that he was, in some sort, more guilty than that angel of darkness.

Oh ! if the sick, in their sufferings, would imitate to some extent this prodigious humility ; if each one would say to himself, with sincerity of heart : “ I should now be in hell, if God had treated me as I deserved, after my first mortal sin. I should at this moment be tormented by the flames of the eternal fire, if God had not been merciful to me. But He has spared me, in His goodness, and through love for me, He has changed the infinite pains of hell, into a light affliction here upon earth. What a motive for me to suffer with patience and resignation ! ”

Yes, humility inspires us with a more powerful motive to suffer afflictions in peace. If you are thoroughly penetrated with this consideration, you will no longer be in need of having your courage strengthened to bear your trials. You would rather have to moderate your ardour for sufferings, for you would become as eager for them as the holy Religious was, whose history I will now give you before I conclude this reading.

5. Father Bartoli, who wrote the life of Father Caraffa, the General of the Society of Jesus, and who was an eye-witness of his most painful maladies, tells us that this holy man had an insatiable thirst for sufferings. The pains with which he was seized he used to call “ his joy,” “ all joy,” according to the expression of St. James. He envied all the sick he knew or visited, and often said that if the saints were to descend from heaven

to earth, they would not go to the palaces of kings, but to the hospitals, to see and consider the poor in their weakness and their sufferings, and that this spectacle would be to them a kind of paradise. Once, when he was suffering from a violent fever, he received the visit of a Father, who asked him how he was. "I am very well indeed," he replied, "for I am in the state in which God wishes me to be, and therefore I could not be better. I know of no evil but that which sin inflicts on the soul." He desired to have himself the sickness of all those who were most incurable ; and when he heard any one giving thanks to God for having preserved him from some great misfortune, he longed to have that misfortune happen to himself. In all his sicknesses, he never made use of any remedy, unless it were very disagreeable to take, and worse than the illness itself. In the complaint of which he died, he was seen on his bed, when suffering most, as calm and as tranquil as if he were enjoying the most perfect health. The serenity of his brow, the pure expression of innocence and love which shone in his countenance, and extended its influence over his whole person, impressed those who beheld him with the idea of an angel adoring his God in an ecstasy of love, rather than a weak mortal in the pains of his last agony. Thus death was to him but a sweet sleep, in which he peacefully gave up his soul to his Creator. Such, we venture to hope, will be our own happy end, if, like this

holy Religious, we labour earnestly for our salvation by a true and profound humility of heart, and by a spirit of mortification. Humility and mortification, by correcting our errors and destroying our vicious affections, will ensure to our souls an unchanging calm and repose, and will enable us to find the greatest delight in the midst of the greatest suffering.

III.

THE PEACE OF THE SOUL CONSISTS IN BEING PERFECTLY CONTENT WITH THE STATE IN WHICH WE ACTUALLY ARE.

1. IF the peace of the soul is necessary for all mankind in general, it is doubly so for the afflicted, for they generally have numberless cares to torment them and cause them anxiety. Some are anxious about the affairs of their family ; others about their suspended undertakings. Some, again, are over-solicitous as to the remedies they should make use of, while others are troubled about their exercises of piety. They all, in general, wish for what they have not, and are never content with what they have. They recur to the past with useless regret, and they seek for motives of disquiet in the future, which are both imaginary and

uncertain ; and they never content themselves with making the actual state of their soul the matter of their chief consideration. Yet this is one of the most essential means of preserving interior peace and true support in the time of affliction.

Yes, all the happiness and perfection of man upon earth consists in continuing in the state in which he finds himself, provided that there is no sin in his doing so ; that is to say, in being always content with everything that happens to him, whether it regards the body or the soul ; in not wishing to be anything else than what he actually is ; in not seeking for anything which he has not ; in finding in himself and in God, who dwells within him, his repose and his happiness. It is an astonishing fact that this exalted maxim of Christianity has not escaped the notice of the pagan philosophers. "The wise man," says Seneca, "is content with himself and in himself ; he does not extend his desires beyond himself, but he says with the master of Zeus : 'I carry all my happiness with me.'" These sages of paganism were undoubtedly in error in thinking that they could be happy without having within themselves the source and fountain of happiness, which is God. But we who possess Him, can say with truth, "I carry all my happiness with me."

Endeavour, then, to find your sweet repose in conforming yourself to the holy will of God. Try

to accustom yourself by degrees to your state of suffering, to this sickness, this humiliation, to this loss, this misfortune: familiarise yourself, so to speak, with pain—just as one tries to tame a wild animal. Give yourself up gently to whatever is painful and crucifying in your actual condition; remain in it in peace and repose; make it the occupation of your heart, and take care not to give your mind and your affection to a thousand objects and desires which bring nothing but trouble to the soul.

2. “Is it not true,” says a holy Religious, “that we ought to have only one care—that of continuing where God has placed us? For we are never in a good state but when we are where His will has destined us to be, and where He Himself has placed us; and all our misfortunes arise from our opposition to this wise and amiable will. Now, must you not acknowledge that the state in which you actually are—whether that of sickness, or of poverty, or of humiliation—is precisely the place, so to speak, where God puts you, by a will which, so far as it is particular and special in your regard, is absolute; since His pure and absolute will has manifested itself to you, by the very necessity you are now in, of suffering? Consequently, you ought to love every decree of the Divine will, as it affects you at the present time; and you ought to love that one, and that only, for you ought to love nothing but the Divine will,

Thus, you ought to love the sickness which God sends you, and you ought to prefer it to the very best state of health, and you ought to esteem it as the best present that heaven could make you."

If you suffer persecutions, they ought to be more precious to you than the applause of the entire universe. Losses, abandonment, and all the vexations sent you by Providence, so far from being a trouble to you, should constitute your repose ; you ought to regard them, and remain in them, with satisfaction, and love, and make them the only and intimate occupation of your mind. Because all these states are necessary for you ; they are Divine states, if I may so say, in which God places you, according to the designs of His wisdom and of His love. He wishes you to remain in them, and bring forth in them the fruits of patience, which contribute to His honour and glory.

Regard, then, your actual condition as a precious cross, to which God Himself vouchsafes to fasten you, and to nail you, through His love for you. O how sweet and honourable it is for you to be thus crucified by those Divine Hands, which are all charity ! how glorious it is to be united to sickness, and the most deplorable miseries, when we see that all this is the action of a God infinitely good, of which we have the perfect assurance by the very necessity of our position.

But to make it a still greater obligation for you to continue in calm and peace under your present

circumstances, I advise you to make your present position your only thought, your only meditation, the only subject of your resolutions, and of your pious conversations ; so that your mind and heart may be always penetrated with your state and condition, and with nothing else. Thus, if you are ill, occupy yourself quietly with your illness, constantly considering with an eye of faith and love, the goodness of God who sends it you. Are you humbled ? think only of your humiliation, but do it in peace and sweetness. Are you persecuted, or overwhelmed with sadness ? employ your thoughts peacefully on your persecutions and on your troubles. But if, on the contrary, you turn away your thoughts from the present action of Divine Providence in your regard, and give your attention to other matters, this diversion of mind will only diminish your strength, by dividing it, and you will never taste any sweetness in your state of trouble ; because in order to find sweetness and unction in suffering, you must, by sweet considerations, familiarize yourself peaceably with it, and thus make your happiness, your centre, your beatitude, consist in the will of God, who wishes you to have this affliction, and you must reject every thought foreign to it.

3. Oh ! if you would undertake, in the view of God's good pleasure, to love only the state in which you are at present, however sad and painful it may be, and none other ; and if you would resolve to rest

in it tranquilly, with loving consent, by thinking of the infinite goodness of God, Who places you in it ; if, by a generous effort, and by a holy abnegation of yourself, you would renounce every other state and position, so as to shut yourself up lovingly in the one in which you actually are, to the rejection of every other, what great and solid peace you would enjoy ! and thus raised above itself, how far would your soul be removed from every trouble ! For, from whence arise the troubles and agitation of our mind ? You know but too well ; they arise from our passionate desire to have everything we have not, and from our impatience in the possession of what we have. But if, when we suffer, we make it our maxim to find our rest and repose entirely and only in the state in which God places us, we shall never be troubled, for we shall wish only for what we have, and we shall make our happiness consist in the actual state in which, by the Providence of God, we find ourselves. In sickness we shall not desire health ; in humiliations we shall not wish to be delivered from them ; in sorrows, vexations, and interior trials, we shall not have a single desire for consolations ; and thus, the heart always the same, will be inaccessible to any alteration ; it desires no other state but that in which it actually finds itself ; and it places its happiness absolutely in the actual arrangement of Providence, according to circumstances as they arise. This is the case when the eye of our faith is pure, for then

in all the states in which we find ourselves placed, we see God acting by His Providence, and with His Divine Hand conducting everything with wisdom and with love. And as we wish only for God, and seek Him only, it becomes a matter of absolute indifference to us what the Divine appointments are in our regard, whether they concern the body or the soul, having no desire for one thing more than another, we consequently experience no trouble, but enjoy the most profound repose.

4. This is what you should do, then, if you wish to possess your soul in peace, and to taste true happiness in the midst of your afflictions. For this end, you must imitate the obedience of a religious to his superior. If his obedience is perfect, he does not consider either the matter, or the place, or the occupation, or the time, or any other circumstance, it is all the same to him. That which alone occupies him, the only thing he regards, is the will of his superior ; it is this which determines him and fixes his attention entirely on what he is commanded to do. He is like one who is blind, he sees no difference between one object and another ; he does not distinguish either the matter, or the form, or the colour ; he forms no judgment about it, whether it be good or bad ; he does not desire one thing more than another ; he is content with what he has, and he is attached to this, and this alone. So should all the arrangements of Divine Providence be to you a matter of perfect indifference,

when you consider them in themselves, and before God. Your mind should rise above them all, above all events, whether they be joyful or painful in your regard ; whether it is a question of peace or of war, of light or of darkness, it matters very little ; it is the same to you, whether you be in the one or the other of these states. But whatever state it is, it ceases to be indifferent, it becomes very precious, from the moment that Providence destines you for it, and places you in it ; for then the will of God, which is the only thing you ought to consider, impresses on this state a character of sanctity, which deifies it.

It is your duty, then, to remain in peace, with love and adoration, in the actual position in which you find yourself ; because this state bears upon it a Divine impression, and, as it were, the seal of God. You ought to remain in it with as much sweetness, and it ought to be as dear to you, as if it held in your regard the very place of God. Yes, this suffering ought to hold in your regard the place of God ; this sickness ought to hold in your regard the place of God ; this temptation, this interior desolation, these calumnies, these persecutions, ought to hold, in your view, the place of God ; because your state, whatever it may be, is a Divine state, having the stamp and mark upon it of the Will of Heaven. Is not this consideration, this fact, enough to enable you to rest with tranquillity and love, even in the most trying and the most terrible

situations, whether with regard to the mind or the body, and to find your delight in them?

We should always return to this great principle therefore, to wish for nothing but God alone. Then we shall continue willingly, and with a love which sanctifies, in the actual state in which we find ourselves; because God is there, and for us, He is not elsewhere. Say, then, without ceasing, in whatever state you may be: "I like only what I have, and I have not a single feeling of love or desire for whatever I have not. If this state in which I am is one of trial, I adore this trial; if it is a chastisement, I adore and bless this chastisement; it comes to me from God Who loves me, and Who is my Father, and I would much rather be chastised by my Heavenly Father, than be caressed by the world.

5. Support your state of suffering, then, in peace and with courage, and compassionate those who through blindness or impatience are never satisfied with their actual condition; and who are in a constant state of anxiety, always running after what they have not, whilst they thus lose an infinite blessing which they have. What can be more solid than this great maxim? Is there anything in the world more solid, more invincible, than the soul which is established and rooted in it? Heaven, earth, even hell itself, rise up in vain against such a soul; they cannot shake it; it is inaccessible to their attacks. However dreadful, however

terrible may be their assaults, nothing can trouble it, because every attempt they make becomes a matter of joy and content to such a soul.

How precious, then, is this maxim! How it keeps the soul always in a state of tranquillity and unalterable peace, by enclosing it within itself, to be occupied with its actual position, and to love it alone! It is in this way that you will find a source of calm and of perfection, where so many only find disquiet; and thus without effort, you will, in the midst of your miseries and sufferings, possess a felicity which others, by their over-anxiety, will never find, even in those positions which appear to be most favoured, and in those notions of virtue which are most agreeable to nature. Oh! how unhappy are they who are obliged to suffer pains of body or mind, from which they cannot free themselves, yet who increase those pains still more, because they will not accommodate themselves to their position, and because they vainly seek for what they will never be able to find! On the other hand, how happy are those who, without unseasonably picturing to their imagination a state which is entirely beyond their control, make even the greatest miseries that can befall them the means of their greater sanctification.*

Such was the habitual disposition of St. Martin. It is related, in the history of his life, that his

* The above is taken from the "Maxims of F. Guilloné."
—*Author's Note.*

mind was always calm and peaceful, even amidst the afflictions and persecutions he constantly had to endure, and that no one ever discerned in him any sign of trouble, disquiet, or sadness, whatever accident or opposition he met with. He submitted so willingly to all the trying events that were ever crossing his life, that he was always found to be sweetly peaceful and tranquil. In sickness, in humiliations, in penance, in poverty, in persecutions, he had always a contented look, a cheerful countenance, a smooth brow, a mild and pleasing expression in his eyes ; his face was more like that of an angel than of a mere man ; it had in it something heavenly, which made one realize in him a living image of the Divinity. Yes, such is the mark and the character of the true children of God ; it is in this, principally, that they resemble their Father in Heaven. The Prophet David even seems to say, that it is God Himself Who appears in their exterior, because he says of them : "He has hidden them in the secret of His face." (Psalm xxx. 21.) St. Martin gave an admirable proof of this tranquillity of mind, in a circumstance which might well have disturbed it. Once when he was travelling, he was surrounded by a band of robbers, who attacked him on all sides. They fell upon him as if they meant to cut him to pieces ; they stripped him of his clothes, and some would have cruelly beaten him, while others talked of hanging him on a tree ; they all assailed him with outrage and in-

sult. St. Martin, in the midst of these fierce and cruel brigands, was like a lamb surrounded by wolves. Resigned to the will of God, which he considered and adored, in what was then happening to him,—as was his custom in all the events of his life,—he did not for one instant lose the peace of his soul; and when he was afterwards asked, if he had not felt some fear while he was in the hands of the robbers, he replied: “I never felt more calm, because I was firmly and perfectly resolved to pass through all that God had ordered in my regard.”

IV.

THE PEACE OF THE AFFLICTED SHOULD BE FOUNDED
ON A FILIAL ABANDONMENT INTO THE HANDS OF
DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

1. THE peace of the soul, to be firm and solid, should rest on a loving abandonment of ourselves to the Providence of God. For, consider it well, whence comes all our trouble of mind, and all the disturbance of our heart, when untoward events occur, which annoy us and thwart our plans? Is it not solely from this cause, that we look at them with the eye of the flesh? that we regard creatures as the main-spring, and the first cause of our trouble? “And it does not enter into our minds,” says a pious

author, "that God would interest Himself about every single step we take, about every trifling event that may happen to us, whether a fly annoys us, or a drop of water falls on our head, or a flake of snow drifts in our face: nevertheless, it is a truth of faith, that Divine Providence does notice, and is the principal agent and the first cause in all these events, however little they may be in themselves; and it is the ignorance of this truth which robs us of our peace, and causes all our vexations and all our disquiet."

We must therefore look beyond this; if we wish to possess our soul in peace, we must not stop at second causes, but penetrate, with the eye of faith, the outer bark of creatures, and see the Hand of God beneath, governing all things with love, giving to all things their existence, their movement, and their life; and Who, in all His counsels and in all His ways, is always enlightened with the highest wisdom, and guided by the most tender love for man.

Oh, what a calm this conviction spreads over the soul, and what an unchangeable repose it ensures to us, amidst all the disasters of this mortal life! For, if our faith shews us a God always intent on guiding us, no event will be able to trouble our minds, and we shall never condemn the Divine Hand of Him, Who watches over us with so much prudence and sweetness. A queen of eminent piety has given France an example of this. Her eldest

son, the heir presumptive to the throne, was taken from her by death, in the prime of life, by a most deplorable and unforeseen accident. In the depth of her distress, the queen cried out : " My God, it is not too much, but it is a great deal ! " What faith ! What resignation !

Thus, in all our misfortunes, our heart being touched, and our mind enlightened, abandoning ourselves to God, we shall say to Him : " It is You, my God, Who are persecuting me ; it is You, Who have made me the object of slander and calumny ; it is You, Who have taken away my child ; Who have deprived me of my fortune, and of my husband : may You be blessed for ever ! " It is thus that, full of confidence in the Divine goodness, we shall remain in such sweet peace and profound calm, that we shall not be disturbed by the slightest agitation, even under the most severe blows, and the most vexatious accidents ; because we shall clearly see and be convinced of the action of Divine Providence, incessantly engaged in these operations of His love and wisdom. You see then what ought to be our centre and our repose ; so that the soul, always keeping her eye fixed on this Divine conduct, and this incomprehensible providence of God, (Who disposes of events according to His own views, and in the time He has marked out for them to take place,) need have no other care than to keep itself in peace and love, in the different states in which God wills it to be,—raising itself incessantly

by faith above all sensible effects, whether interior or exterior ; considering only the designs of God, without anxiety about itself, without thinking of what it feels, or what it is, or what it likes, or even of what it suffers. Its only occupation is, to unite itself to God, to see His action, and to love His conduct and guidance. When we force ourselves to continue in these holy dispositions, in spite of all disgust and natural repugnance, when we do violence to ourselves for a time, to obtain a settled tranquillity, even in the midst of trials ; then the unction of grace and heavenly consolations soon come to sweeten our crosses ; our faith becomes more pure, the light we receive increases our love ; and the peace of God, which is above every gift, comes to fill us with its consolations. Oh, how delightful then appear to us the crosses God has sent us ! Pains, sorrows, sickness, temptations, then become favours and blessings in our eyes, because, as we have renounced ourselves, in order to love and adore the arrangements of Heaven, we have no other care than to allow ourselves to be guided in the ways that Providence marks out for us, and we thus enjoy the most perfect repose.

2. But observe that, if we thus abandon ourselves to Divine Providence, we shall see its action in the slightest trials, in the least events, and in the most ordinary details of daily life ; in an unkind word, in a headache, in a temptation in a refusal, in a mark of contempt. It can hardly be

believed, how vigilant our eye will be to unite ourselves lovingly to this adorable conduct of Providence, and how we shall bless It, every instant, for all that It ordains. Oh, what a precious maxim it is, in order to enjoy a holy repose, always to behold Divine Providence, with the eye of faith, in all the untoward events that happen to us! But is it not also painful to see, in the very midst of Christianity, and of all the light of the Gospel, that there are so few persons who know this precious maxim, and who put it in practice, whilst men born in paganism have made it the principle of their whole conduct? Epictetus, whom we have already quoted, is admirable when he treats on this subject. His words are as follows (Dissert. Ariani. lib. iv. ch. 1): "I have found a living fountain of peace and repose, which will never fail. It is a perfect acquiescence in the will of God, and a firm confidence in His Paternal Providence. For, if I wish all that He wishes, shall I not be happy at all times? And if I find all that He does is good, is there any thing that can give me displeasure? I am resolved, then, to put myself henceforth into His Hands, and to allow myself to be governed entirely by His orders. I wish everything that He may wish; and I accept, from this moment, all that He may send me. Does He wish me to be sick? I wish it; that I should be poor? I wish it also; that I should be humbled, or that I should be honoured? I subscribe to His wish. Does He judge it fit to prolong

my life? I also think it good ; does He prefer that I should die? it seems better to me also. May He ordain, as to my life or my death, whatever pleases Him. He is the master of both."

The same philosopher says elsewhere (Dissert. Ariani. lib. v. ch. 5) : " I pray God to give me the grace to die, delivered from the tyranny of my passions, and that I may be able to say to Him : ' My God, have I ever contradicted You? have I ever complained of Your government? I have been ill, because You willed it ; others have been ill also, it is true ; but with regard to myself, it has been with my full consent. I became poor, and I was glad to be so, because it was Your will. I have had no charge or authority over others, because You did not ordain that I should have any. Have You seen me more sad on that account? Have I not always walked before You with a cheerful and contented countenance? always ready to do whatever You commanded me. You now wish that I should leave this world ; I leave it, and I am under an infinite obligation to You for granting me so great a favour as to invite me to join in Your festival above, to contemplate the greatness of Your works, and the admirable conduct of Your Providence.' "

In another place, still speaking of God, he says : " Since You permit me to live in Your kingdom, what office do You wish me to hold in it? Do You wish me to be a statesman, or do You destine me for private life? to be a member of the senate, or

one among the people? a private soldier, or an officer? a schoolmaster, or the head of a family? The place, the rank which You will give me, will always be the one I desire to have, and I will die a thousand times rather than abandon it. Where do you wish me to be? At Rome, at Athens, at Thebes? All places are the same to me, provided that wherever I may be, it will please You to be mindful of me. If You send me where man cannot live, I shall not leave it without Your command."

3. Is not the language of this pagan more than sufficient to humble and confound us? The little knowledge he had of the wisdom of God, and of His good providence, gave him so much confidence in His protection, and produced in his soul so profound a peace, that no event could trouble him or excite in him the least displeasure! And we, reared within the pale of Christianity—fully instructed in the teaching of the Gospel—we hesitate to cast ourselves into the arms of God's loving Providence, to establish in Him our peace and our happiness, and to abandon to Him all the care of our future! Is not this conduct quite unworthy of the name of Christian, unworthy of the favours which Heaven has so lavishly bestowed upon us? And do we deserve to have for our ancestors and fathers in the Faith so many illustrious saints, whose entire life was a filial abandonment to Divine Providence? For, let us set aside

the pretended sages of pagan antiquity—we have no need, thanks be to God, to envy them their models of virtue ; we have far more beautiful and more perfect models to study in that immortal company of saints who, in all ages, have been the ornament and the glory of the Church. And, without seeking for examples in times more remote, let us go back to an epoch not far removed from our own day—an epoch, it is true, of crimes and of terror, but one also in which an heroic faith and charity manifested themselves with perhaps as much perfection as in the first ages of Christianity.

A virtuous priest had well-nigh reached the end of his long and laborious career, when the Revolution broke out in 1793. It was then that the greatness of his soul was fully displayed, when he found himself exposed to the horrors of persecution, the victim of calumny and of the most envenomed hatred on the part of the enemies of the Faith. In 1791 he had refused to take the schismatic oath, and he remained in the midst of his dear parishioners of Puymasson in spite of all the dangers which menaced his life.

But impiety soon redoubled its fury : blood-thirsty men were sent into all the provinces, and the venerable old priest, seventy-five years of age, was arrested as refractory to the law and disobedient to the public authorities. He appeared among his persecutors as calm as if he had been in the midst

of the flock of which for so many years he had been the shepherd and the father. In all his trials, he constantly adored the holy decrees of Divine Providence, and showed by the serenity of his soul with what confidence he abandoned himself to the Divine guidance. There was something so imposing in his superhuman virtue, that his presence inspired even his enemies with respect and veneration. The guards who were ordered to arrest him, scarcely dared to approach him, and trembled to lay hands on his person. But the holy priest encouraged them, saying to those who had brought the manacles to bind him: "Do your duty, as I have done mine; lead me off with violence, since you have received the order to do so—I shall owe you no ill-will for it: the more ill-treatment I receive, the more content I shall be to suffer for Jesus Christ." He was taken to the prisons of Agen, where he had to endure all sorts of inconveniences and bad treatment. He only left the prison to appear before the judges, who interrogated him about his sacerdotal functions and the instructions he had recently given against the priest who had introduced himself into his parish. His replies were as firm as they were truthful. The judge admired his courage, and in order that he might not be condemned by his own replies and avowals, asked his permission to modify them a little in his report of the trial. "I give no consent at all to this," replied the old man; "I

have said nothing but in accordance with the holy Gospel, and my duty is to announce it at the peril of my life. Do not rob me of the happiness of sealing it with my blood, and of dying for the Faith."

In the present case, the question of danger should be no consideration whatever. "I am in the hands of God—I commend myself to His Divine Providence ; He will dispose of me according to His designs. Man, in accomplishing his own culpable projects, is only the minister of His will." The sentence pronounced against him only condemned him to a fine of 300 francs, and he was set at liberty. He returned to his parishioners, whose salvation was so dear to him, and for some time he had the consolation of feeding them with the bread of life. But the order for transportation was soon given : he was again arrested in 1793, in Holy Week, and he was again taken to the prisons of Agen. On the way there, he was an object of compassion to all who had any feeling. His great age, his infirmities, the outrages he received from his ignorant and cruel guides, inspired every one with pity,—and at length with admiration—when they witnessed his calmness and resignation under so many insults and indignities.

He said to those who pitied him : "I thank God for the grace He has given me to suffer for His name, and in the same week in which He suffered death for my love. I regard this resemblance as

one of the greatest favours He has granted me." The prison into which he was thrown was a frightful place—a dark dungeon, which was to become almost his grave. He had nothing to lie upon but filthy straw, which emitted such an infectious odour that it made the dungeon unbearable. The venerable Father soon began to feel the symptoms of a mortal illness. The progress it made was so rapid that they were obliged to remove him to the hospital, where he became the edification of all the sick. The Sisters of Charity had no more powerful motive to urge the sick to patience than the example of this holy priest. It was while giving the greatest edification by his meekness, his resignation, and his abandonment to Divine Providence, that he ended his holy though painful career, and died the death of the saints.

4. But I must not omit here a point of great importance. It also is founded on the abandonment to the conduct of Divine Providence which we ought to practise. It is, never to propose to ourselves to do more for God than He wishes us to do. He wishes that we should offer ourselves to do everything, and that we should abandon ourselves to suffer everything. But our zeal, our ardour sometimes goes farther than He desires. There is, perhaps, no work we seek for so eagerly, and of which for this reason we should have so great a distrust, as the undertaking of great enterprises which regard the glory of God; because of themselves

they naturally animate our courage, and, in other words, our self-love has a greater share in them than the Spirit of God. "We must," says a holy Religious, "practise a great abandonment of ourselves into the hands of God, embracing beforehand all the states and all the trials to which Providence may please to subject us. But as to the rest, with this generous offering of ourselves, we ought always to cherish a holy indifference as to the particular state which God destines for us, and to the kind of cross which He vouchsafes to prepare for us. By this indifference and this detachment, our heart will remain free in the midst of the greatest occupations, calm in the failure of our most favourite projects, and as content to do nothing as to conquer kingdoms."

In such detachment consists that sublime poverty of spirit which raises the soul to such a state of holiness and perfection, that it sees nothing that belongs to itself—that is its own, so to speak—but the pure and simple oblation of itself. In this state, whatever we do that is great, whatever we suffer that is heroic, we regard as something exterior to ourselves, and as entirely belonging to God,—as His work,—and we see God alone in it. Hence comes that admirable indifference for the highest and most honourable occupations; hence, also, that continual and heartfelt joy in the most painful positions and in the most obscure employments. How noble and sublime before God is this interior

disposition ! How sanctifying to the soul is this acquiescence, by faith and love, in all the changes of our Lord's conduct in our regard ! How this interior and incessant immolation of our entire being to the rigorous, but always paternal, decrees of the Most High multiplies our merits and wreathes for us a glorious crown in heaven !

5. If we remain steadfast to this fundamental maxim of Christianity, to this spirit of sacrifice, we shall love to regard ourselves as the victims of Providence; we shall set much more value on the ruin of all our projects, than on the most brilliant success that might attend them, according to the flattering ideas our hearts may entertain of them ; because where the creature dies to itself, there God lives and reigns,—where the created ceases, there the Almighty begins, and establishes that supreme dominion which redounds so much to His glory.

We ought not, then, either to cherish or venerate anything so much as the state in which we see all our designs thwarted, and in which our hearts will never derive any satisfaction from the events of life. Our perfection should consist in an absolute independence of all possible states,—rising above what is created and sensible, to lose ourselves and be wholly absorbed in God alone, who in the ruin of the universe, should alone suffice to fill our hearts. Therefore, if you possess a generous soul, you must desire, with the saints, that all that

would induce you to die to yourself may happen to you, and that all that may satisfy even your most innocent desires may be withheld from you,—so that your heart, thus emptied of all attachment to the creature, may be alone with its God, and aspire after nothing so much as to be His victim : always disposed to do His good pleasure in everything and everywhere.

It is often more profitable for us in our enterprises, to reap a harvest of suffering, than one of brilliant success. God will always be glorified in us if, in these enterprises, He carries out His own designs, and not ours ; since it is often for the glory of His name that the fine projects which we form for His honour should be totally ruined : God has more need of our death and destruction (*i.e.* of the death and destruction of our self-love), than of all the rest ; for this He can bring about, by an infinity of other means, with glorious success.

‡ This maxim was so deeply impressed upon the inmost soul of St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, that when he saw the members of his order spread over almost every part of the world, and that by their virtues and talents they had gained universal respect and confidence,—he used often to say that, though the greatest trial he could experience would be to see the extinction of the Society, yet if God permitted this calamity, it would take him only one quarter of an hour to recover his interior peace. The following circum-

stance is mentioned in his life, in which we shall see the beauty and tranquillity of his soul displayed.

In the history of his life we read, that one day sailing towards Rome, in a vessel crowded with passengers, St. Ignatius was overtaken by a fearful tempest, which soon brought the ship and crew to the brink of destruction. The storm raged with such violence, that the masts were shivered, the rigging destroyed, the sails rent in shreds. The vessel, now tossed on high by the violence of the waves, and again dashed into the yawning gulf below, soon filled with water, and death seemed inevitable. The passengers were so seized with anxiety, and fear, and despair, that they ran about the ship, as if beside themselves, filling the air with their heart-rending cries. In this general dismay, Ignatius was the only one who preserved his presence of mind. In his case, it was not stolid indifference, but true greatness of soul. He saw all the danger of the position, but he saw it in the spirit of peace, which sprung from faith and trust in Providence. And after this escape from shipwreck, when he was asked whether he had not been afraid of death during the tempest, he replied : " I never felt more calm than at the moment when all seemed lost. I had only this one regret,—that I had not served God more faithfully."

V.

TEXTS FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE, WHICH MAY SERVE
AS SUBJECTS FOR MEDITATION, AND EJACULATORY
PRAYER, FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN AFFLICTION.

THROUGH many tribulations we must enter into
the kingdom of God. (Acts xiv. 21.)

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things,
and so to enter into His glory? (St. Luke xxiv. 26.)

The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence,
and the violent bear it away. (St. Matt. xi. 12.)

How narrow is the gate and strait is the way
that leadeth to life. (St. Matt. vii. 14.)

All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall
suffer persecution. (2 Tim. iii. 12.)

If any man will come after Me, let him deny
himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.
(St. Luke ix. 23.)

Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall
laugh. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall
mourn and weep. (St. Luke vi. 21.)

My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall
fall into divers temptations (trials) . . . knowing
that the trying of your faith worketh patience,
and patience hath a perfect work. (St. James i.
2, 3, 4.)

Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I
will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. (Ps.
xlix. 15.)

My son, in thy sickness, neglect not thyself, but pray to the Lord, and He shall heal thee. (Eccl. xxxviii. 9.)

And now, O Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, the soul in anguish and the troubled spirit crieth to Thee. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for Thou art a merciful God. (Baruch iii. 1.)

Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled, and my soul is troubled exceedingly. (Psalm vi. 3.)

I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly. Forsake me not, O my God, do not depart from me; attend unto my help, O Lord. (Ps. xxxvii. 9.)

Look Thou upon me, and have mercy upon me, for I am alone and poor. (Ps. xxix. 16.)

My soul hath cleaved to the pavement; quicken Thou me, according to Thy word. (Ps. cxviii. 25.)

O my Lord, help me, a desolate woman, who have no other help but Thee. (Esther xiv. 3.)

Give us help from trouble, for vain is the salvation of man. (Ps. lix. 13.)

Our God is our refuge and strength, a helper in troubles which have found us exceedingly. (Ps. xlv. 2.)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, Who comforteth us in all our tribulations. (2 Cor. i. 2, 3.)

To Thee, O Lord, justice . . . O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face . . . We have departed from Thee, we have not hearkened to the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His law, which He set before us. (Daniel ix. 7, 8, 9.)

The joy of our heart is ceased, our dancing is turned into mourning,—the crown is fallen from our head; woe to us, because we have sinned. (Lament. v. 15, 16.)

I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved. (Job xxxiii. 27.)

I will bear the wrath of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him. (Mich. vii. 9.)

And that this may be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, He spare not. (Job vi. 10.) The more we are afflicted in the present life, the less we shall be afflicted in the life to come.

See my abjection and my labour, and forgive me all my sin. (Ps. xxiv. 19.)

A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. (Ps. l. 19.)

Think diligently upon Him, that endured such opposition of sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds. (Heb. xii. 3.)

Let us run with patience to the fight proposed to us, looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith,—Who having joy set before

Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, (Heb. xii. 1.)

Christ suffered for us ; leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps. (1 St. Peter ii. 21.)

Christ therefore, having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought. (1 St. Peter iv. 1.)

A man of sorrows, acquainted with infirmity, we have seen Him . . . We have thought Him, as it were, a leper, and as one struck by God ; 'despised, and the most abject of men. (Isaiah liii. 3.)

O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow. (Lament. i. 12.) Contemplate the Saviour, the innocent Lamb, tied to a pillar, covered with blood ; see Him crowned with thorns,—was there any sorrow or pain like His ?

If sons, then heirs ; heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ; yet so if we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him. (Rom. viii. 17.)

A faithful saying ; for if we be dead with Him, we shall live also with Him ; if we suffer, we shall reign with Him. (2 Tim. ii. 11.)

But if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed, you also may be glad with exceeding joy. (1 Peter iv. 13.)

Blessed are you, when they shall revile and

persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you untruly, for My sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven. (St. Matt. v. 11.)

The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared to the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us. (Rom. viii. 18.)

For that which is at present light and momentary of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. iv. 17.)

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more. (Apocal. xxi. 4.)

For, as the kings insulted holy Job, so his relations and kinsmen mocked at his life, saying, Where is thy hope, for which thou gavest alms, and didst bury the dead? But Tobias rebuked them, saying, Speak not so, for we are the children of the saints, and look for that life which God will give to those who never change their faith from Him. (Tobias ii. 15.)

Wo to them that are faint-hearted Wo to them that have lost patience, and that have forsaken the right ways, and have gone aside into crooked ways. (Eccles. ii. 15.)

If those lose hope, being weary in the day of distress, thy strength shall be diminished. (Prov. xxiv. 10.)

Take all that shall be brought upon thee ; and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. (Eccles. ii. 4.)

Therefore we also, from the day that we heard it, cease not to pray for you, and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding ; that you may walk worthy of God, and in all things pleasing ; strengthened with all might, according to the power of His glory, in all patience, and long-suffering with joy. (Coloss. i. 9.)

For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord : thoughts of peace, and not of affliction, to give you an end, and patience. (Jerem. xxix. 11.)

You have seen the patience of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is merciful and compassionate. (St. James v. 11.)

Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries ; the days of man are short ; all the days in which I am now in warfare, I expect until my change shall come. (Job xiv.)

But this every one is sure of, that worshipeth Thee, that his life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned ; and if it be under tribulation, it shall be delivered. (Tobias iii. 21.)

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been proved, he shall

receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to those who love Him. (St. James i. 12.)

To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me on My throne. (Apocal. iii. 21.)

Patience is necessary for you, that doing the will of God, you may receive the promises; for yet a little, and a very little while, and He that is to come, will come, and will not delay. (Hebrews x. 36.)

Be patient, therefore, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, patiently bearing till he receive the early and the latter rain. Be you therefore also patient, and strengthen your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (St. James v. 7.)

COLLOQUY WITH JESUS DYING.

O good Shepherd! behold now the hour, when, according to Your own words, You must needs give Your life for Your flock. You have also said, that the greatest proof we can give of our love, is to lay down our lives for those who are dear to us. But is it necessary for this end that Jesus should die? Live, O true Friend of my soul! You have already given me too sure proofs of Your love; You have no need to die to convince me of it.

But how shall death venture to approach You,

Who are the Fountain of Life? How can You depart from this world, and leave me in it? How shall I be able to remain in it, without You, O my only consolation? The sufferings You endure in this state of crucifixion, O my God, are unlike any other sufferings that have been endured in this life, and far beyond them. Your body, made heavy by its own weakness, is only supported by the nails which fasten it to the cross. The wounds in Your Hands and Feet are becoming larger and larger, and increase Your sufferings every moment. Why do You not take a little rest, at least, before You die? Will You, then, be tormented without intermission till Your last breath? O constant love! O invincible patience! O incredible perseverance!

What a beautiful example You give me, O my Saviour! From this moment I desire to follow it, and to remain at the foot of Your cross; to weep there, in the bitterness of my soul, over Your death, and over my sins which caused it. But I know not, O most holy soul of Jesus, whether I ought to desire that You should soon leave Your body, or that You should still remain in it. If You leave it, You deprive me of life; and if You continue in It, this innocent Lamb of Your Body is cruelly tormented. Transfer to me all the pains It suffers, and then do whatever it may please You.

O charitable Father, Who hast adopted me, at the cost of such great labours, say to my soul some life-giving words of farewell, which it may never

forget. Give me Your blessing, since it is Your wish to part from me. O Jesus ! Friend of my soul ! Is it possible that the light of my eyes does not fail me ? How can I live to behold this Body become cold at the approach of death ? Since You have not strength to support Your head, and it bends towards me, once more open Your eyes, and look upon me in mercy. Penetrate my heart with the sweet light that issues from those Eyes, now languishing in death, and fill it with Your love ; for how can I live, after having seen You die, unless You leave me Your love, to console me for Your death ?

O Father of mercies ! O amiable Spouse of my soul ! O faithful Companion of my trials ! You will die then, O my Saviour, and I cannot oppose Your will. At least, in dying, do not abandon me ; since You are dying for me. At this moment, when You are about to leave me, look upon me, and listen to the prayer which I offer You. I ask of You, O my Saviour, Your Cross, to console me in Your absence ; Your Love, that I may constantly sigh after You ; and a fountain of tears, night and day to bewail the unhappiness of having offended You. Yes, my God, Your Cross, Your Love, and my tears, must be the food of my soul during the short time I have yet to live.

Oh ! my Jesus, I already behold in Your Face the paleness of death ; Your eyes become dim, Your soul is on the wing, You are expiring. . . .

O my soul, recollect yourself; and now that your Saviour and your Spouse is dying, embrace Him tenderly, receive His last breath, and remain united to Him, and quite lost in Him. If words fail you, be not troubled on that account; now is not the time to speak, be silent, and profoundly recollected; and be content with saying, O my Jesus! O my Love! O my Saviour! either let me die with You, or do You live in me for all eternity!

Go then, sweet Jesus, since You will to go! Go, my only hope! take rest after Your great labours, and let Your exile come to an end. Go, and give the good thief what You promised him: receive his soul as the first fruits of Your Passion, and the pledge of man's salvation, and let him take possession of Your kingdom, in the name of all sinners. Go, O Divine Consoler, return to Your Father, who is calling You; destroy, by Your death, the terrors that attend our own; since it is by that death that we go to You. Go, but do not delay Your return; hasten the moment of Your resurrection; this will be a fresh proof of Your love, and will do no violence to the truth of Your words. In rising again to life, You will restore it to my soul; it will revive with You, in order to possess You, and to be possessed by You—to lose itself, and be transformed into You, O my Jesus, my love, and my sovereign good! (F. Thomas of Jesus.)

O Mother of God! it is at your side that I

would be consoled for the loss of my Redeemer. Receive me into your arms, and wipe away my tears, by making me worthy of your love. O Mary, would that I could make up to you the loss you have just sustained in your well-beloved Son ! Would that I were a worthy child of yours, and, by a holy life, deserve to have you for my Mother ! Supply, O most pious Virgin, all that is wanting in me, and may I at length become your consolation, your joy, and your glory ! Amen.

PART THE SIXTH.

OF THE LOVE OF GOD IN AFFLICTIONS.

I.

EXCELLENCE OF THE LOVE OF GOD IN SUFFERINGS.

“IF I speak with the tongues of angels,” says the great Apostle; “if I have not the love of God, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and if I should have prophecy, I should know all mysteries, and all knowledge; and if I should have all faith, a faith strong enough to remove mountains, and to transport them from one place to another, if I have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, if I have not in my soul the love of God, it profiteth me nothing.” (1 Cor. xiii.) One can add nothing to these magnificent words. They raise charity above all other virtues; they show us that charity is the greatest and the most precious of all the gifts of Heaven. It is charity which gives to hope and to faith all their merit and all their value.

It is by charity, and by charity alone, that the soul is great before God, and has all power over His heart. But if divine love is so admirable in itself, what shall we say of its marvellous effects? What shall we say of its strength, its activity, of its powerful action in a heart, of which it is the life? You seek some relief in your sickness; you desire to suffer with more patience, with more resignation, your bodily pains, your interior trials, which make life almost insupportable. Ah! seek this patience and this relief in the bosom of Divine charity! Love a God who is infinitely amiable; attach your heart supremely to this infinite goodness, and you will find therein an ocean of sweetness, which will drown all your sorrows, and will blunt the feeling of your sufferings. "Love," says St. Augustine, "feels no bitterness. If it walks upon thorns, those thorns are soon changed into flowers and roses." It says, with St. Paul, "I superabound with joy in all my tribulations." "Who, then," he says, "shall separate me from the love of Jesus Christ? Shall tribulations, or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or persecution? or the sword?" (Rom. viii. 35.) No, Lord, it is not the fear of death which shall separate me from You, because You are my life. It is not the love of this life, for I am ready to lay it down for You; nor is it the powers of hell, because You are more powerful than they; nor things present, because they pass away; nor any future accidents, for they can only happen by Your order. It

is not tribulation, because You console me ; nor sorrows, because by them You expand my heart ; nor hunger, because You satisfy it ; nor poverty, because You enrich me ; nor perils, because You are my confidence and my safety ; nor persecution, because You protect me ; nor the sword, nor torments, nor sickness, nor vexation, because all those trials are sweet to me through my love of You ; and as coming from Your paternal Hand, they are changed into real blessings.

They who love God are far removed from the fear of bodily pains ; on the contrary, they ardently desire them, in order to be able to give Him proofs of their attachment. "You may sharpen your instruments of torture," said St. Agatha to the tyrant ; "you may starve the lions to make them more hungry ; you may light your fires, and prepare the rack. For the love of my Saviour, I desire all these torments more than the weary hart pants for the fountains of water to quench its thirst."

"If you wish to cut off my head, here it is ; if you wish to scourge me, my shoulders are ready for the stripes ; if you wish me to be burnt alive, here is my body ; if you wish me to be devoured by wild beasts, here are my hands, my feet, all my members. Burn, cut, tear, bruise my body, torment it as you like ; the more you make me suffer, the more you will load me with blessings. I shall only be dearer to Jesus Christ by giving Him more proofs of my love."

"The greatest mark we can give of our love," said the Saviour of mankind, "is to lay down our life for those whom we love ;" and as suffering is a kind of perpetual death, we may add that the most certain proof of a true love is to suffer, and when we suffer, to do so for the object we love. "Now, I know that you fear God," said the Lord to Abraham, "and that you love Him, because you have been willing to sacrifice your only begotten son for His sake, and with him everything you hold most dear." (Gen. xxii.) "If thou would'st get a friend," saith the Holy Spirit, "try him before thou takest him, and do not credit him easily ; for there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble." (Eccles. vi. 7, 8.)

To love God when He gives you sugar, according to the expression of St. Francis of Sales, is like what children would do ; but to love Him when He gives you gall and wormwood, is the property of great souls. This is, doubtless, the reason why the holy King David (when speaking of those who love God only for His divine perfumes—that is to say, who love Him in moments of sensible devotion, when they are without pain or trouble of mind, but when their interior is full of sweetness and consolation) calls such souls novices in the way of salvation. "The young maidens loved Thee exceedingly." But when he wishes to describe those, who, with a noble and generous heart, love God and His Will, even to the desire of carrying the cross of tri-

bulation, and of carrying it without any alleviation, he represents them as having large and magnanimous hearts, which expand by sufferings. "When I was in distress, 'Thou hast enlarged my heart.'" (Ps. iv. 1.) "These are they," says St. Augustine, "who, despising all earthly pleasures, spring forward towards God. If they meet with obstacles, with afflictions, or with pains, humiliations, or vexations, they rise on the wings of love, and surmount all difficulties, in order to unite themselves to God, the centre of all their desires."

It is evident, therefore, that if there is true love upon earth, it is principally to be found in those who suffer and who are content and happy in suffering. St. Thomas asks if Jesus Christ has shown us more love in dying on the Cross than in establishing the sacrament of the Eucharist. And he answers, that the love He shows us in the Adorable Sacrament of the altar is more like the love of the Blessed. "Now, the love which reigns in heaven," says the holy Doctor, "is much more perfect, more purified than that which is found upon earth." It seems, then, that the love of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is in fact greater than that which made Him die on the Cross for our salvation. "However," adds St. Thomas, "since the love we have for any one is to be measured by that which we bear to ourselves—that is to say, it is so much the more pure, as it obliges us to make greater sacrifices—we must conclude that the Son

of God loved us more in laying down His life for us on Calvary than in instituting the Eucharist." In the tabernacle, He loses nothing of what He is; on the Cross, He loses honour, property, friends, life.

Love is the gift of one's self, according to the expression of a great philosopher. Now, the greater the gift, the dearer, the more precious, the greater is the love. It is not, then, in fervent prayers, in glowing aspirations of the heart, in inflamed desires, in intimate communications, when the soul is liquified, in a manner, and seems to melt in God—it is not in these favours that the love of God consists, and manifests most its purity and its strength—these states are precious, without doubt, when we receive them with humility and with the sole desire of strengthening ourselves against the time of adversity. But they are not the sure mark of love; often, indeed, they are the snare of the tempter, who would deceive sensual souls by these sensible sweetnesses. True love shows itself in suffering, as true courage shows itself on the field of battle. Give me a soul that endures in peace the most crucifying dispensations of Divine Providence—that accepts the most severe trials of mind and body with a loving submission to the Divine Will—one which suffers, and wishes to suffer, in view of God's good pleasure—and you will find in that soul the character of pure love.

In fact, what love is more pure than that which makes us love God at the expense of self? which keeps us under the pressure of afflictions, in order to please the Divine Majesty? which disposes our hearts to wish never to be without the Cross in this world, and to be willing to carry it unto death, if such be His good pleasure—always blessing Him for having laid it upon us?

It is thus that St. Francis of Assisium loved God. He was one day tormented with an excess of bodily pain, and one of his Religious, touched with compassion, said to him: "Father, why do you not ask God to deliver you from this torment, or at least to lessen it?" The Saint replied, with a sigh: "If I did not know your simplicity, I should immediately dismiss you from my Order for being so rash as to put yourself in opposition to the Will of God." Then, to make some sort of reparation for the brother's fault, he threw himself out of bed, kissed the ground, and said: "I thank you, O Lord, for all the pain I feel. I am ready, if it be Your good pleasure, to suffer a hundred times more; for my greatest consolation is that You do not spare me, and that You perfectly accomplish Your holy Will in my regard."

This great Saint consecrated himself entirely to God, in a severe illness; and from thenceforth his body was always, as it were, the theatre of suffering,—where all manner of infirmities came, so to speak, to play their parts. He laboured

under these infirmities for twenty-five years. He suffered so much from pain in his eyes that he was fifty days without being able to take any rest. He constantly had pain in his head, and in his back; and also a burning fever; no member of his body was free from pain. Yet he never made any complaint; there was always a smile on his lips, serenity on his brow, and the greatest peace and calm in his soul. He was heard continually blessing and praising God; and as he knew that these infirmities proceeded from Him, he was wont to call them affectionately his sisters, and tenderly loved them.

How beautiful is such a soul! How great in the eyes of God, when it esteems itself happy to suffer thus for His glory! How true and real is such a love! how pure it is, when, to please its beloved, it is happy to remain in the most extreme suffering! We may even say that this manner of loving God in suffering, is the only one of which we can be certain that it is holy and supernatural, and that it springs from the grace of the Holy Spirit. For what but Divine grace could inspire us with a love so pure? Could it come from the angel of darkness, who dreads nothing so much as to see a soul love God and His holy Will—even to the degree of wishing to suffer all that it pleases Him that we should suffer—with the conviction that it is the state most pleasing to God, the one best calculated to glorify Him, and to

atone for our offence? Can we believe that the tempter would place us in a disposition so contrary to his pernicious designs upon us? Shall we say that we derive this love of the Cross from nature? What is there more contrary to nature than that which causes its death? If it were nature, we might say that nature sought to destroy itself; for the love of suffering is nothing else than the hatred and the death of nature. The grace of the Holy Ghost is, therefore, the only principle that can inspire us with this love of suffering, and impart to our will that supernatural inclination to wish to suffer all that it may please God to make us suffer; and consequently, if there is true love of God upon earth—a love holy and sanctifying—it is principally to be found in those hearts that love His good pleasure, even in suffering, and wish to be treated as victims, by this adorable Will.

“If I am overwhelmed by afflictions,” exclaimed St. Jerome, “yet, Lord, I will bless Thy holy Name; and whatever trial I may experience, I desire that Thy holy Will should be accomplished in me. What does it matter what state I am in, provided I am in the one in which You will me to be? What right have I to complain? Is it not the Lord Who sends sickness and health, honour and humiliation, joy and sadness? Who am I that I should oppose His designs and murmur at His conduct? Let us suffer, then, as much as it may please God for us to suffer; and I shall be too

happy if, by my sufferings, I can atone for the sins of my past life."

Such is the language of love, and such is the noble disposition of heart which the Son of God demands of us, to enable us to follow Him, and to become His disciples—"to renounce ourselves and to carry His Cross," that is to say, to love God to the degree of wishing to hate ourselves—by renouncing our own will, and by enduring, in the view of His good pleasure, all the afflictions it may please Him to send us. This is "to lose one's life for the love of Jesus Christ," but to lose it in order to find it again in life eternal. "They who love God purely," says St. Chrysostom, "forget themselves to be absorbed in Him. They look with an eye of indifference upon glory, ignominy, pain, and pleasure. They make so little account of life and death that one might think them strangers to their own bodies. Earthly joys are insipid to them, and crosses are their delight. Are they tried by long and cruel afflictions? They find themselves therein as in their proper centre; their love increases in their afflictions, and the soul comes forth from them in more resplendent purity,—like gold that is purified by the fire."

Happy, then, are those whom God conducts by the way of tribulations! Happy in suffering, and in wishing to be treated as victims, they can recognise in themselves the most certain mark of predestination—that is to say, that love of God

which is pure, disinterested, and supernatural. Yes, you are happy, if, when you are overwhelmed with the most acute suffering, or a prey to sadness and languor, you bear this painful state in peace, in order to accomplish the Will of God Who has placed you in it! Happy, if deserted by those most dear to you—deprived of all human consolation—you also experience interior trials more bitter than any physical suffering, perplexities of conscience, spiritual anguish, fear for your salvation;—happy, I say, if in this apparent abandonment by your Heavenly Father, you continue patient with Jesus Christ on the Cross—resigning yourself as He did, and saying: “May Thy will be done, O my God, and not mine!”

Such was the constant disposition of St. Gertrude. Our Lord appeared to her one day, and presented her, with one hand, health; and with the other, sickness, saying: “Choose which you most desire.” “Lord,” replied St. Gertrude, “I have no desire but Yours; all that I wish for is, that You would have no regard whatever to my own will, but that You would do with me all that You think best for Your greater glory. If You consider that health will be good for me, I accept it, but on condition that You put a curb on my passions, and not suffer the flesh to revolt against the spirit. If it is more profitable to me to be sick, and if You will thus receive more honour, I accept sickness, however trying I may find it. I abandon my body to You, to

become a victim of pain and suffering ; I sacrifice to You, my health and my life. You are my Father and my Physician ; it is You Who have given me being ; it is for You to preserve it for me."

"O my God ! I do not trouble myself about what state I am in, provided that I am entirely Yours, and that I obey Your Divine Will ; this is all my desire. Since I am in the world only to honour You, and that nothing honours You more than a soul that is tranquil in suffering,—I accept, with all the submission of mind of which I am capable, all the sickness and suffering that I endure, and all that it may please You to send me hereafter. Henceforth, I wish to glory only in my infirmities, in order that the strength of Your spirit may dwell within me, and that You may reign by the Cross, over my body, and over my soul, which I immolate for ever to the glory and to the love of Your Divine Majesty."

II.

RESIGNATION IN SUFFERING IS A CONTINUAL
EXERCISE OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

A RELIGIOUS, one day, wrote as follows to a person in affliction : "When I think of the state of suffering in which you have been for so long a time,

it appears to me to be the most proper means which our Lord could give you, to render you holy and pleasing in His eyes. While you are suffering the sweet rigour of His Divine Will, and submitting to it with a loving and filial resignation, you are making an act of the love of God, the most pure and the most perfect. This generous abandonment is considered to be the highest and most meritorious act of the Christian life. By it we may acquire the most precious crowns for Heaven. In truth, when I see you thus under the Hand of God, submissive to all His designs, and content to suffer in quality of victim, to submit to the most painful operations in view of His good pleasure; you inspire me with more envy than compassion. Oh, if you knew the inestimable value of this state, if you knew the gift God bestows on you, when He gives you the grace to suffer for His love, and impresses upon you the image of His Son's Passion; if you knew the value of this precious favour, you would need, I think, to put yourself on your guard against cherishing feelings of self-love, at the sight of such a mark of Divine predilection! Keep yourself, therefore, in the spirit of humility; try to consider yourself, after the example of your Divine Master on the Cross, as a lamb, meek and mild, which allows itself to be immolated and slain without the least resistance; conforming to all the Divine appointments, and leaving yourself to be moulded by the Hand of God, to whatever form it may please

Him to give you. This state of a victim, between life and death, always dying and still living, enables you to make a continual act of the love of God, and discovers to you the secret so little known upon earth, that of always loving God with a love, at once the most pure, the most disinterested, and the most meritorious." (Letter of F. Rigolan.)

These are very consoling words for any one who is afflicted. Yes, this is the great advantage of persons who are suffering, who are always in a state of crucifixion,—who have not to carry the cross by intervals, but whose habitual state is the cross, either with regard to mind or body, and very often with regard to both. It is, we say, in this that consists their great advantage, that they are always able to love God, and with a most pure love ; since, always suffering, and always wishing to suffer ; by this constant acceptance of their sufferings, and a perfect acquiescence in their trials ; they are always united to God, in a manner the most intimate and most pleasing to His Divine Majesty. Their will is perfectly conformed to His ; and this, in spite of the repugnance of nature, the revolts of the flesh, and all the violent attacks of pain.

As this state of habitual suffering is an incessant struggle of the spiritual with the animal man, of grace with nature, of Divine love with self-love, we may say that those who always continue faithful to God in the midst of this combat, always attached to His holy Will, invariably fixed in His

good pleasure, never cease for one instant to practise Divine love, and to make as of the purest and most perfect charity. Yes, this life of trials and sufferings, this life of humiliations and crosses, borne in a spirit of heroic resignation, when the soul is incessantly saying to God : “Not my will be done at any time, but always Thine ;” this life of constant abnegation, of continual mortification, in which self-love has no satisfaction, but is always contradicted, vanquished, and in a state of agony ; such a life as this is a continual act of love, a victory and a triumph, gained every instant, by the strength and the grace of the Holy Spirit, over the corruption of the flesh, and over the love of ourselves.

O how happy is the state of such a soul, thus immolated to the Divine Will ! What glory it procures to God ! What treasures it amasses for Heaven ! If one single act of love is of an infinite value, if it is worth more than the whole world ; if, as a holy Religious once said, we ought to esteem it more than all the empires of the earth, and to prefer it to all the treasures and the palaces of the greatest potentates and mightiest monarchs, what immense riches, what a precious crown does that suffering soul acquire, while in this state of a victim, wholly occupied with the love and the glory of God !

We must not be surprised if the angel of darkness makes every effort to deprive us of this holy disposition ; for they who are raised to such high per-

fection before God, are more powerful against the Devil, than an army in battle array. By the virtue of their prayers, and their intercession with God, they destroy his empire. They are dying victims, incessantly offering to the Lord, a sacrifice of sweet odour, which brings down upon the earth abundant blessings from Heaven, and obtains for souls the most signal graces. How many sinners do they not snatch from hell ! How many sheep that had strayed from the fold are brought back to it by their powerful interest with God ! How many of the agonizing are saved in their last hour, by their intercession !

St. Alphonso Liguori relates of a pious nun, that on one occasion, feeling herself inflamed with zeal for the glory of God, she asked of Him, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the conversion of ten thousand sinners. At the end of her prayer, a scruple came into her mind, for having made such a demand. She thought she had committed a great indiscretion, and she returned to her prayers to humble herself and to ask the pardon of her fault. What was her astonishment and joy when she perceived, by an interior and supernatural light, the Blessed Virgin, showing her in Heaven that same multitude of souls, of which she had asked the conversion, and saying to her : " You think then, daughter, that I am not powerful enough to grant your petition, and that the prayers of the afflicted

soul are not pleasing to my Son? Pray for sinners, and your crown will be a beautiful one."

What cannot a suffering soul accomplish which is thus animated by the Spirit of God? What graces may it not obtain for all the members of the Church? The influence of its virtue is spread, so to speak, over the whole universe; its love is a fire, a light, and, if I may venture to say so, a sun, whose kindly rays give light and heat to all mankind. This soul, burning with charity, goes in spirit over the whole world, and addresses God in behalf of all the wants of its brethren. It sometimes prays for the souls in Purgatory; sometimes for the agonizing who die by thousands every hour of the day; sometimes for poor idolaters, plunged in the shadow of death; and finally, for those heretics who have some wish and intention to give themselves to God. Its love would convert all hearts, and enchain them to the heart of God.

Ought we then to be astonished to see the tempter employ all his wiles to turn us aside from this exercise of love, which is so glorious to God, so salutary for ourselves, and so fatal to his own designs? He knows too well that we cannot glorify God in a manner more noble and divine, and that we can only raise ourselves in His sight by frequent acts of pure and disinterested love; as when we forget all our own interests, to be occupied with those of God; when we renounce our own desires, our own dearest and most lawful in-

clinations, in order to embrace the will of God, with all its rigours ; when we are pleased with all the states of trial in which Providence places us ; when we esteem ourselves happy in suffering for His good pleasure ; to give Him content, at the expense of our own satisfaction ; and in rejoicing at not being content ourselves, provided that God is content, and that His Will is accomplished. Of all these dispositions, there is not one of which the tempter is more afraid than this. Thus, when he sees that a soul has come to such a determination, and that, instead of turning back, it advances with rapid strides in the way of virtue, without his being able to make it consent to sin,—then all his wiles, all his stratagems and efforts, are directed to keep it from the holy exercise of the love of God, and to occupy it with itself and its own imperfections.

To succeed in his pernicious design, this enemy of our salvation tries to persuade us that to love God truly, we ought to be actually occupied with the contemplation of His infinite perfections, and to be in an habitual elevation of mind from the study of His divine attributes, that we could not love a beauty so ravishing, a charity so unspeakable, without feeling our heart to be all on fire ; that we should be in an unceasing transport of love ; that our mind would always be profoundly recollected, and fervently attached to this divine object. That if, on the other hand, we find ourselves in contrary dispositions, intent on our duties and occupations,

on our bodily infirmities, and our overwhelming spiritual trials; feeling a distaste for spiritual things, lowness of spirits, and a repugnance for our exercises of piety, we ought not to pretend to love God, and consequently we ought to renounce the exercise of divine love.

Such is a very common snare, by which the tempter endeavours to stop the advance of those who are in the way of perfection. There is no artifice which he does not employ to make them fall into it; and he succeeds the more easily, in proportion as he finds a fund of self-love in us, always disposed to welcome whatever flatters us, and to reject whatever may make us die to ourselves. In order to destroy so great an error, it is enough to call to mind this fundamental truth: that the love of God does not consist in the feeling of affection; that it does not proceed precisely from the inferior part of the soul, the seat of sensibility and of the imagination; but that it has its source in the will, which resides in the superior part of the soul; and according to the expression of St. Francis of Sales, in the highest point or summit of the spirit, where God alone reigns, with His holy love, in an absolute void of every created thing, and in the simple view of faith, exempt from all sensible images and representations.

From this you may conclude, that we may love God in whatever state we may be in: in the state of trial and of suffering, as well as in that of plea-

sure, in sadness, or in joy, in fervour or in dryness, in anguish or in delights ;—since in those states which are crucifying, in order to love God, and to love Him with a pure love, it suffices to acquiesce in all that afflicts us ; to accept our suffering in view of His good pleasure ; to keep ourselves in peace, in the midst of the most severe trials, and to be content not to be content, if God so wills it.

Let us recall to mind the history of Tobias, related in the Holy Scriptures. We shall see therein an admirable example of this pure and disinterested love. This virtuous Israelite found himself, at a very advanced age, obliged to quit his country, and to go and pass the rest of his life in a strange land, subject to a hard and humiliating slavery. Living there, in the midst of idolaters, every kind of affliction befell him, and his virtue was put to the hardest trials. Burning with zeal, as he was, for the glory of God, he was not only pained to find His holy Name blasphemed and despised by those pagan people, but his soul was still more saddened by the scandalous conduct of his exiled brethren, who walked in all the ways of those infidel nations, observed their superstitious practices, and abandoned the true God, by a cowardly and shameful apostasy. Yet this holy old man, supported by his faith, remained firm and constant in the love of God. The grounds for affliction, though so many and grievous, far from making him lose courage, gave it a fresher impulse. Although mixed up

with this crowd of impious and barbarous men, his eminent virtues gained him a great reputation amongst them, and his virtue increased and shone forth like a lily in the midst of thorns.

His charity signalised itself towards his unhappy brethren, exposed, as they were, to all the horrors of persecution. He relieved all their wants, strengthened them by his words, animated their courage, distributed among them all that he could spare of his own means ; to some he gave food, to others clothing, and to all, motives for consolation in their trials. He made it a duty, or rather a pleasure, to visit the sick, to comfort all who were unhappy, and to help all who were unfortunate. His kind heart made him extend his charity even to the dead. One of the ordinary exercises of his zeal was to give burial to those of his brethren who died of misery and suffering, or those whom he found lying on the ground, murdered by their enemies. Duties at once so sacred and so painful, ought naturally to have attracted the esteem and the veneration of his relatives ; and after such fatiguing labours, he had a right to expect that he would find repose and consolation, on returning home to his family. But to purify his love still more, the Lord deprived him of so legitimate a satisfaction. From his friends and relatives he only received bitter reproaches. They blamed his conduct ; his charity was treated as imprudence ; his zeal as blind rashness, and his labours, in their eyes, proceeded

from ostentation. The holy man bore all in silence, offering to God, in the secrecy of his heart, the sacrifice of these fresh troubles, rejoicing to have Him only, as the witness of his virtues. However, the Lord, who wished to present us a model of patience in the person of Tobias, prepared a new kind of trial for him, which, from its character, gave him a finished resemblance to the predestinated. One day, being extremely fatigued after performing the funeral rites for some of his unhappy brethren, he wished to return home ; but he was so weary on the way, that he fell asleep at the foot of an old wall. There was a swallow's nest above his head. The fresh dung of these birds fell on his eyes, and made him blind. Tobias was deeply moved at this new trial; but always strong in faith, and having his heart fixed on God, he did not for a moment give way to any feeling of bitterness or vexation. Struck by the hand of the Lord in the midst of his good works, never did the slightest complaint escape his lips. He continued in His fear and in His love, continually giving Him thanks every day of his life.

Admire this beautiful soul amid so many reverses and misfortunes. All creatures seemed to unite to raise up new afflictions for him. His neighbours load him with reproaches ; his relatives treat him as fool-hardy ; even his wife blames him for doing good ; and, to crown his misfortunes, God Himself seems to fall upon him with a heavy

hand, in striking him with blindness. Under the weight of so many trials, what does the holy man do? He casts himself into the hands of God; he abandons himself, as a little child, to His Paternal Providence, content to find no consolation elsewhere, but in Him, and to suffer for His love! "You are just, O my God," he exclaims, "all Your ways are full of truth, of mercy, and of wisdom. You chastise, and You pardon; You conduct to the gates of death, and You save us from it. For me, I will not rejoice but in You alone; and You will always, O my God, be the joy and the life of my soul." (Tobias iii. 1, and xiii. 2.)

Such is the language of true and pure love. They who live an interior life, and one of suffering, should never lose sight of this truth, that those arrangements of Divine Providence in our regard, which might seem most likely to hinder us from exercising the love of God, such as humiliations, temptations, violent dislikes and distastes, lowness of spirits, bodily sickness, vexations, and trouble of mind, fear, and an excited imagination; that all these crucifying states serve to increase this holy love within us, and are the very states most calculated to kindle this sacred fire in our hearts. And why? because it is then sufficient, in order to love God purely, to wish all these states, to acquiesce in them, in view of God's good pleasure, and to submit to them with an entire and loving preference for His Divine will. And this love is never

more pure, more solid, or more ardent, than when in the midst of all these adversities, we continue firm and in peace, wishing for nothing but God, and the accomplishment of His holy will.

Yes, the afflicting crosses you bear with patience, all serve as precious fuel, to kindle, to feed, to inflame the fire of your love, if you see the Divine will in them, if you approve of the Divine decrees, if you accept them willingly, if you submit to them lovingly. For then you will love God's good pleasure, and His holy will, at the expense of your own. You will love that will for its own sake ; you will make the content of God your own content, that is to say, you will be content with what contents Him, and not with what contents yourself. What makes Him happy makes you happy. However much you may be afflicted you will be joyful, with the joy of God ; whatever sorrow you experience, your pleasure will be to see in it the pleasure and satisfaction of God ; and thus you will consent to the loss and destruction of all that you have, and of all that you are, to see God reign in you, and accomplish His Divine will in you.

It is only in thus accepting our crosses, in view of God's good pleasure, that we can keep ourselves in the love of God, and raise ourselves above everything that can deprive us of it. What can the tempter do, to draw us away from this actual and permanent union of our soul with God, that union with God he dreads so much, and against which

he employs all his infernal strength? All that he can do to distract us from it, is to suggest to us extravagant thoughts, or to fill our imagination with melancholy images, or to move us to impatience, or to endeavour to throw the soul into trouble or confusion; but these very temptations, far from disturbing our union with God, will only render it still more strict and intimate; that is if we look at them in the order of the Divine will, if we bear them in peace, in view of God's good pleasure; for He is pleased and happy to see the soul engaged in the combat for the love of Him. And thus all the efforts of the angel of darkness will only furnish us with so many opportunities of signaling our love and our fidelity to God, by fighting generously for His glory, and by accomplishing His will in those states which are the most crucifying.

Let us then love our state of suffering; let us love our bodily weakness, our annoyances, our losses, our humiliations; since they are the happy bonds which unite us to God, and which attach us constantly to His adorable Heart. Let us kiss these infinitely precious chains of love, which bind us inseparably to the charity of Jesus Christ. If at times they appear rather heavy, if they make us sigh under their weight, let us think that they only make us dearer to our Lord, they render our love more solid, and offer a more resplendent glory to God.

“My companion and I had the happiness,”

writes the young Binbenet de la Roche to his brother,* "to see our hands loaded with fetters. I cannot conceal from you, that more than once upon the road, I kissed those chains so honourable, and never was my heart so brimful of delight as during this journey. We were exceedingly moved to see that the greater number of those who approached us on our way manifested their compassion for us, and seemed to deplore our fate. As for us, our mind was so resigned, and our countenances so serene, that the people admired and wondered at us. We performed our usual exercises of piety, in spite of our fatigue, and the annoyance of our chains ; and this won us the kind attention of our guards. One of them, who was instructed in his religion, was so touched by it, that we saw him several times shedding tears ; and after dinner he was unwilling to put the chains on us again. But however, we begged him to do so, fearing that on our arrival in Paris, the kindness he had shown us by this act of humanity, might be made a ground of accusation against him. We have been waiting for more than three months and a half, for the bill of indictment, and the summons to appear in court,

* He was born at Courmenin, near Romorantin, had served in the army of Condé, and was condemned to death in February, 1794, as a soldier in the army called "Royal Catholics." His joy was great when he saw the guillotine, and on mounting the scaffold, he chanted the Psalm, "Praise the Lord, all ye nations,"

but it has not yet come. May God be praised ; I will not hasten its coming by one instant, neither will I put any obstacle in its way. I will leave everything in the hands of Divine Providence. I repeat it, Divine Providence knows better than we do, what is necessary for us. And, thank Heaven, I have not been dull for five minutes since I first came here. I feel more and more the effect of your good prayers, to which I unite myself every morning, according to our agreement. Therefore, do not change the hour of seven, it is the time I get up, and we are then united in a particular manner during twenty or thirty minutes. We have, as I have told you, the result of that precious instrument (it was thus they agreed to call the Holy Eucharist).* Thus we have nothing to desire, except it is to suffer more for the love of Him, who suffered so much for the love of us. But as we have not reached this point yet, let us at least demand of our Divine Saviour the love of sufferings, and then the desire we shall have for them will be as meritorious in the sight of our Heavenly Father as if we suffered in fact. Our exercises of

* "The result of that precious instrument." This expression is purposely obscure ; but by "the instrument" we may understand the Cross, the sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross ; and by "the result," the Presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist ; the result or continuation of that same sacrifice, offered up in the Holy Mass, under the appearances of Bread and Wine.—*Translator's Note,*

piety occupy us a portion of the day, which very much diminishes its length. I have increased my library by 'The Spiritual Combat,' and 'The Introduction to a Devout Life.' The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, which I am exact in reciting, with that of our Angel Guardian, my Rosary, some spiritual reading, and a meditation, fill up almost the whole day. Courage, then ! pray for me I entreat you especially to have no anxiety on my account ; on the contrary, rejoice that I have something to suffer for the God whom I adore. I finish my letter in the same manner as St. Paul ; it is the only conclusion that can delight the ear of a Christian : ' May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the charity of God, and the communication of the Holy Ghost be with you all ;' peace be with you, my dear brother."

The following is what he wrote the same day to his mother :—

"I entreat you not to be at all uneasy at my position ; but rather thank God for the graces which every day He bestows upon me. I am where Providence has brought me—and, morally speaking, I cannot be better placed. If this God of goodness wishes to call me to Himself, in the prime of life, by a death which is as sweet as it is honourable, then, my good mother, what thanks ought I not to return Him for having vouchsafed to think of me, in preference to so many others who serve Him infinitely better, and thus to with-

draw me from this wicked world, bursting the bonds which keep me upon earth, in order to gain me the reward promised to those who do the will of their Heavenly Father. Let us submit, then, to His Divine Majesty if we wish to reign with the adorable Son of Mary. Let us detach ourselves from the vain and frivolous goods of this world, to think only of those of which all the powers of earth and hell cannot deprive us. Ah ! my dear mother, if we had faith, we should desire persecutions, reproaches, humiliations, and all the afflictions which wicked men could bring upon us ; we should prefer them to all that is most capable of delighting us in this world. The adorable Jesus did not make the conquest of His kingdom by the road to Tabor ; and if he there manifested His glory for an instant, it was but to encourage us, and to give us an idea of the glory we shall enjoy in a kingdom whose Sovereign is clad with so much beauty and majesty. But the Saviour, full of love for us, preferred the blood-stained road to Calvary, and sealed with His Precious Blood the holy religion which He had preached to those, who only repaid Him with ingratitude. Man, as a reward for His vigils and labours, mercilessly deprived Him of life, inflicting on Him torments which the human mind cannot realize. After His example, see, my good mother, if a Christian ought not to esteem himself happy, very happy to have something to suffer, especially with the hope of

Heaven ! Men cross the seas to amass a vile metal, which will perish with themselves ; and should not a Christian be willing to endure a few months of captivity, some slight privation—even death, which is very sweet in itself—to make the conquest of a kingdom, where all the desires of the human heart are satisfied ? . . . I hope you will find in your religion an efficacious remedy in your affliction. Do not think of me, but as I do of you, that is, in your prayers only, and always according to the good pleasure and the holy will of the Lord. As to the property to which I have a claim, I have a sovereign contempt for it, and with all my heart I bid it an eternal adieu. I am too ambitious to attach myself to such a trifle. I prefer what is solid, and I am convinced that in the bottom of your heart you will say that I am right. . . . Thus, my much esteemed mother, we must detach ourselves, by degrees, from the things of this world ; they were never made to captivate the heart of a Christian, who ought to be continually thinking of his last end, and of the great day of the general judgment, when I hope we shall be again united, to possess a life exempt from all the infirmities we are subject to in this our life upon earth. Perhaps we shall meet again sooner than we think, who knows ? . . . Leave everything to Divine Providence. Almighty God knows better than we do what is best for us, and He will turn all things to our advantage, provided that on our

side we place no obstacle in His way. I am in want of nothing ; be tranquil on this subject. Do not say any more of me, what I am convinced you have said, perhaps too often : ‘ O my poor unhappy son ! ’ Do not make use of any such expressions, for, in the mouth of a Christian, they are a sort of blasphemy. For Jesus Christ has told us in His holy Gospel, that they are blessed who suffer persecution for justice sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed ! I am not therefore unhappy, unfortunate, miserable : these are expressions the world uses. Foolish world ! How very little you know of the happiness of those who suffer for justice and for the truth ; and still less of the joys of those who shed their blood for the most just and the most holy of all causes. Thus you see, it is of faith that I am blessed. I hope you will not oppose this sublime truth, which makes the charm of my life.”

III.

IT IS ONLY BY ALWAYS SUFFERING, THAT WE CAN
ALWAYS LOVE GOD.

THE love of our soul is something so great, and so precious in the judgment of God, that after His own glory, it has been the principal object of His labours. “ It is with the design of possessing it,” says a holy Religious, “ that He came forth from His eternal repose, and created the world. Before

the creation of man, see how the Almighty draws forth from the abyss of nothingness, an immense multitude of creatures ; and as He does not find one among them capable of feeling the ardours of Divine love, He does not stop at these inferior beings. He has other views. This material world is only one part of the Divine plan ; it is like a beautiful garden, prepared for planting therein a precious tree, from which He was to gather the fruit of all His works. Man is this tree of life, destined to fulfil the designs of God, by giving Him the fruit of love. Thus God, in order to gain man, has enriched him with His gifts, and lavished upon him all that is most precious, both in the order of nature and of grace ; and the only recompense He expects for His labours, the only return of gratitude He hopes to receive from this privileged creature, is the love of his heart. Provided that man loves Him, God requires nothing more of him ; He is perfectly content, and He regards him as having paid Him all."

But by an incomprehensible excess of His Divine goodness, He does not regard Himself as owing nothing to man, when He possesses his heart. This offering of love, which He receives from man, and which is due to Him, on so many titles, He regards as a debt which He owes him, and which He voluntarily undertakes to pay. Pay it then, O Lord, open the treasures of Your omnipotence, search among the multitude of created things, that you

may find an exact equivalent in value to man's love. Behold Him, then, this great God, seeking for such . . . and He finds nothing equivalent to man's love, except Himself,—His very Divinity: "I will be thy exceeding great reward." He gives it to us, and in thus giving Himself, He does not think that He pays too dearly for the love of a soul that is devoted to Him, to gain which He has undertaken so many labours and made so many sacrifices.

What then is this love of our soul, that it should be raised so high in the judgment and esteem of God? What! has this love which I value so little, this love which I lavish perhaps on vile creatures, or at least, which I allow to become feeble and exhausted, while I am indulging in idleness and dissipation; has this love been indeed the object of God's designs, the one only end of all His works? The Almighty has gone forth from Himself, as by an ecstasy of love, to gain my heart! What am I saying? He resolved to leave Heaven, He consented to endure all the toils of a laborious and penitential life, in order to get possession of it. He preferred the love of my heart to His own repose, to His own joy, to His own happiness. He has valued it at a higher price than His own Blood, He has judged it more precious than His own life, since He sacrificed His life on the Cross, to attract us to Himself! What injustice, what ingratitude it is, to refuse Him my love! But also, what joy I procure Him, what glory I render Him, if I give it to

Him without reserve ; if I consecrate it to Him for ever, if I make a continual sacrifice of it to Him, and to His service ! “ I do not know,” says a pious author, “ all the value of the love of a soul, when it is pure and disinterested. But when I consider that the sinner who despises God, does Him an infinite injury, I cannot doubt that a soul which loves God purely, renders Him indeed an infinite honour ; although, in fact, God derives no advantage from His goodwill.”

“ But how,” says St. Francis of Sales, “ can we exercise the pure and true love of God, except among thorns, and crosses, and bodily infirmities, and especially when they are of long duration ? How can we be continually exciting ourselves to Divine charity, if our self-love, the love of our own corporal and spiritual well-being (that capital enemy of the love of God, which never ceases to arrest its progress by a cold selfishness), is not constantly dying, by the destroying action of afflictions, and the habitual feeling of pain ? . . . The constant exercise of this pure and disinterested love is reserved, therefore, for those privileged souls whom God conducts by the way of tribulations, and whose ordinary state is that of trial and sadness. For, it is then only that the suffering soul, deprived of all human aid and support, and stripped of all sensible joy, goes forth and of itself rises by faith to a supernatural state, in order to find repose in God alone, and in the accomplishment of the Divine

will. The continual pain it feels, obliges it to think of God incessantly, and to unite itself to Him; and this incessant suffering is, if I may venture so to express myself, like fuel to feed the fire of its charity, and does not allow the flame to diminish for a single instant. This truth has been confirmed by numberless examples in the persons of the saints, and especially the martyrs. Their love of God was never so active as in sufferings and persecutions. For these generous Christians, the whole time of terror and distress was the time of fervour, in which they aspired after nothing but the happiness of sacrificing their lives to God. They did not cease to bless and praise Him when in fetters, in prisons, on the rack, and even when exposed to be devoured by wild beasts.

The Revolution of 1792 has furnished us with instances of what I have said, quite equal to those of the first ages of the Church. We will mention the case of a young priest of the diocese of Dax, named Jacques Damborges, the vicar of a parish near Pau. His generous refusal to take the oath of obedience to the civil constitution of the clergy, caused him to be arrested, and thrown into the prison of Tartas, whence he was soon removed to that of Dax, which was the chief town of that division of the department of the Landes. It was there he was tried by the criminal tribunal of the Revolution, and condemned to death as refractory to the law. The account of the last events of his

martyrdom was written by a priest imprisoned with him, who also ended his life a month later on the same scaffold. The following is the account of his martyrdom, as it was transmitted to us by a friend of this latter confessor of the faith :

“Damborges, that Christian hero, was arrested at the age of twenty-two, and was led, with a chain round his neck, to the prison at Tartas, where I was confined, with several other priests. On entering the prison, he expressed great joy at finding himself in such religious company. He embraced us with inexpressible tenderness. His air, his manners, his conversation, did not permit us to doubt, for a single instant, the purity of his motives and the generosity of his sentiments. He was impatient to be examined, because it would give him an opportunity of professing his faith, and his religion, in the most public manner. His wishes were soon realised. On the morning of the following day, he was summoned before the tribunal, where he appeared with a courage almost supernatural. Being questioned on matters concerning the faith, the only ground of his arrest, he replied in a tone so firm and so decisive, that the judges immediately condemned him to the punishment of death, as a fanatic and an enemy of the Revolution. He heard the sentence with the same firmness as he had shown in his replies. It was a matter of unutterable joy to him. When he was dismissed from the tribunal, he left with a kind of precipitation,

because he was so impatient to come and tell us that he was condemned to death for the faith. 'O! what good news I bring you,' he exclaimed, on approaching us. 'My dear friends, the trial is over. I am condemned to death. I am so happy! God be praised! I hope that He will receive my sacrifice.' If you had seen, as I did, the joy that shone in his face, you would have shared my admiration. But there was no guillotine, nor any executioner at Tartas, where the authorities had determined that the execution of a priest, for his faith, should take place, and it would require seven days to procure them from elsewhere. The holy priest profited by this delay, which would have been so cruel to any one else. He did not lose a single instant in preparing himself more and more, for the great sacrifice that he was about to make to God. No words can express the deep love of God with which his heart was penetrated. We saw him pass whole days in a course of different exercises, all of which had for their object the adoration of his Creator, and the intention of rendering the holocaust he was about to offer Him, pleasing to His Divine Majesty. When he rose in the morning, he made a long meditation; then he read the lives of the saints, and the Holy Scriptures; all his time was thus religiously filled up. During meals, and in his conversation, he gave great edification to his fellow-priests, as well as while he was at his prayers. He would often exclaim with a holy impatience: 'Will

the time of my deliverance never come?' 'The guillotine and the executioner are so long in coming.' Every night, when he retired to rest, we heard him repeating these words: 'This, I hope, is my last night,' and he would calmly fall asleep, reciting some passage of Holy Scripture. The jailer's wife could not help admiring his tranquillity, and she expressed to him her surprise. He gently replied, with a smile: 'Why should I not be satisfied to leave this miserable world, since I am going to another, where there is neither convention, nor committee of inspection, nor revolutionary tribunal? There I shall be free from all fear, and I shall have nothing to dread from the threats of men. How greatly I pity those who remain among them! I would not exchange my lot for theirs.' On another occasion, seeing her sad on account of the punishment of death to which he had been condemned, he said to her: 'Do not be uneasy. Man has judged me very severely, but I hope for a milder judgment from God. I beg you to acquaint my judges that I forgive them for the sentence pronounced against me, though it is unjust. It is true they decided according to the law; but that does not justify them, because they obeyed a law that is unjust. I desire that God may pardon them, as I do myself. I shall pray for them.' When he knew that the day of execution had arrived, the joy that shone in his countenance appeared to us to be such as might be caused by the intuitive vision

of God. Some of the prisoners shed tears at his fate, and he said to them : ' Your grief is the only thing that distresses me. Take courage, my friends, my hour of rest approaches. God is about to accept the sacrifice of my life, and then I shall be happier than you.' When he understood, by the noise outside the prison, that he was to be immediately taken to the scaffold, he began to pray, and recited aloud the prayers for the agonising, with such fervour and unction, that all who were present were deeply moved. Hardly had he finished, when the door of the cell was opened,—the turnkey had come to fetch him. Damborges immediately arose, and followed him to a room down stairs, where the executioner was in attendance. On entering, he kindly saluted him, and presented him his head, so that, according to custom, he might cut off his hair, which might interfere with the execution. When this was done, he said to the executioner : ' Now, let us go ;' and to the assistants : ' Farewell, friends,—pray for me.' He walked towards the place of punishment with the courage of a soldier of Jesus Christ. Having reached the foot of the scaffold, he mounted it with a firmness which astonished the spectators. He wanted to address the people, but his voice was drowned by the noise of the drums, which began to beat at that moment,—and one could only hear the words, ' I die for my religion.' "

When we say that it is only in the state of

suffering that we can continually exercise the pure love of God, we do not mean that we cannot love purely even in the midst of consolations of joy and the sensible delights of God's presence and grace. But we must remark (and those who are thus favoured should pay particular attention to this observation) that, in order to keep ourselves in the true love of God, and to love Him purely, it is necessary that what constitutes the happiness of the soul during these consolations, should not be the joy to see ourselves in this state of sweetness, peace, and satisfaction ; but it should consist only in the view of the Will of God, Who is pleased to give us this sensible comfort. But in these states of consolation where nature requires satisfaction, there is great reason to fear that what makes the soul happy is not so much God's good pleasure as the sweetness it finds in devotion—by reason of that violent inclination we all have towards our well-being, and which never perfectly dies within us ; there is reason, I say, to fear in these states of consolation that unless Divine Providence contrives to furnish us continually with opportunities of trial and suffering, it is extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to know—and much more to be sure—that we love God truly and purely ; for to be happy in those states in which the soul has nothing to suffer, and when it is lost in an ocean of peace and consolation, is no proof in itself that we love God truly and purely.

“It is difficult,” says St. Francis of Sales, “to take pleasure in looking at a beautiful mirror for any length of time without seeing oneself in it, and without taking pleasure in looking at oneself. It is not at all easy to love God without at the same time loving the pleasure we feel in loving Him; for holy love is a sentiment so sweet that we allow ourselves to be deceived imperceptibly; and instead of loving God for the sole pleasure He has in seeing Himself loved, we love Him for the pleasure we feel ourselves in the exercise of this love: that is to say, we are attached to the love we have for God, instead of loving God Himself; and we cease to find our pleasure in God, in order to please ourselves in the pleasure we have in loving Him. In a word, we make our happiness to consist, not in God alone, Who is the true object of our love, but in the love we have for Him, which love we regard as our proper and essential happiness. Hence our love is not, truly speaking, the love of God, but the love of ourselves. But this is not the case when we are content with not being content; when in states of trial, of sadness, of distress, of privation, of lowness of spirits, of infirmities, and numberless other similar conditions, we keep ourselves in peace, and we consent with our whole heart that God should keep us in these painful states as long as it may please Him to do so. This is being content with not being content. For thus our love is not according to nature; it

does not flatter our self-love, since our self-love finds its death in these states of trial. In these states we do not experience any sensible satisfaction, any sensible joy ; we do not, then, love for the pleasure of loving, since all within us is bitterness. It is only the Will of God that we then consider : it is His good pleasure, His glory, His joy which form our happiness, our pleasure, our joy, and this it is precisely which renders our love so pure, so holy, so glorious, and so pleasing to the Lord."

And consequently, also, it is this which should so endear to us the state of suffering in which God places us. "Oh, how happy are they," exclaims a holy priest, "who love God purely for His own sake, without regard to their own interests." We may say that, 'amidst the miseries of the present life, they already enjoy Paradise.' "What does it matter to me," such a one can say, "what does it matter if I am unfortunate, despised, abandoned, provided that my God is happy? Provided that I am doing His Will, and that He finds His good pleasure in me, I am infinitely content with the happiness of my God. In the state of affliction in which He has placed me, He has His Eye always fixed upon me, and I forget myself in order to consider and love His infinite love. It is true that I experience in myself, and I see around me, nothing but trials and sufferings ; but I go out of myself, and I lift myself up to my Saviour by the

love I bear Him ; and living more in Him than in myself, I no longer feel my afflictions, and I rejoice in His infinite joys. I am lost in the ineffable delights of the Divinity. Nature often struggles within me, self-love sometimes shudders under the trials which mortify it ; but it is only another subject of joy for me, when I think that the suffering I feel is an additional satisfaction to my Saviour, Who sees that I bear it courageously for His love."

"I am never better," said St. Augustine, "or happier than when I am not so—that is to say, than when my corrupt nature and my self-love are absent—because where I am not, there God is. Where there is not your own will, your own judgment, your own soul, your own body,—there God is. If you are there, God is not there ; and all that is there, is your imperfection, vice, disorder. Strive, then, that you may not be in any way in yourself, by the annihilation of yourself, for it is thus that God will be found in you and will reign in you."—(Confess. ch. xxiii.)

The way of arriving at this holy annihilation of self, is to be content with not being content, to be always joyous at seeing yourself always in suffering, and to find your pleasure in being always without pleasure ; and to this end, it is not necessary that the heart should overflow with joy on seeing itself without any content, for that is hardly possible, or at least it is extremely rare ; but it is

enough, if, in this absence of content or in this state of suffering—as far as nature is concerned—you keep your interior in peace, and that the will is disposed to accept this sadness and this want of satisfaction, and does actually accept it, and with such generosity that you would not do anything to leave this state, if you had every facility for doing so.

According to an able and experienced director, it is even sufficient, in this state of sadness and affliction, if we keep ourselves in silence and in patience—not making any complaint about ourselves, never deploring our fate on seeing ourselves reduced to drag on a dying life in a continual absence of content—avoiding with even greater care all murmuring against those about us, whatever displeasure they may cause us—regarding them with an eye of faith, as instruments which Divine Providence makes use of, to give us an opportunity of practising His pure and holy love in a life always afflicted, always dying.

The following method was given by an able director to his penitent, as a means of arriving at this mystical death of self-love:—"See in peace, what you would not wish to see; suffer in peace, what you would not wish to suffer; hear, but in peace, what you would not wish to hear; and you will then have reason to believe that you are always dying to yourself, that you are always content at not being content, and consequently, that

God alone being in all that you do, your love is always pure and constant."

St. Francis of Sales relates that one of the most excellent musicians that ever lived, and who was perfect master of the lute, in a short time became deaf, so as entirely to lose his sense of hearing. However, on account of the great facility he had acquired, he still sang, and played on his instrument with great skill and delicacy. But as he could not enjoy the pleasure of the harmony, and the sweetness and beauty of the melody, which can only be appreciated by the ear, he sang and played but rarely, and only to gratify the wish of his prince, whom he had a great desire to please, on account of the great benefits he had received from him, having been brought up with him from his earliest youth.

The desire to please the prince was so great in this musician, that it may easily be conceived how great was his joy when his master manifested his pleasure at his performance. It sometimes happened, also, that the prince, wishing to try the musician's fidelity, after having sent for him to sing, would leave him abruptly, to follow the hounds, and would leave him alone in his apartment. Then the faithful musician, still animated with the desire which had induced him to begin, would continue to sing and play, as if his master had been present. It is clear that in these circumstances, he had no pleasure in singing; certainly not the pleasure of

the melody, because he could not hear it ; nor the pleasure of gratifying his master, for he was not present.

Oh, how happy is the heart that resembles this amiable musician, and that in loving God, seeks no other content but that of contenting God, who is pleased with his love. For, can we imagine a love more pure and more perfect, than that which differs not from the pleasure God takes in Himself? So long as I sing on in Your presence, O my God, and that Your eyes, fixed on me, tell me that You accept the canticle of my love, what a consolation it is for my heart to give content to so great and so good a Master ! But when You deprive me of the consolation of Your looks, and that I have no witness or proof of the pleasure You take in my love, O Lord, what then becomes of my soul, and how great is its suffering ! Yet it does not cease to be faithful to You ; it continues to chant its canticle of love ; but it is not for the pleasure it finds in doing so, for my soul is in bitterness when You are away ; it is only the pure love it has for Your holy Will, which sustains it, and which makes it continue its song of love.

We see a sick child will courageously take and eat whatever is given it by its mother, in spite of the distaste it has for every sort of food. It has not the pleasure of taste, but it has another pleasure more gratifying and estimable—that of pleasing its mother, and of seeing her content. But what shall

. . .

we say of another sick child, who likewise has no appetite, and does not see its mother ; but because it knows her intentions, it takes what is offered to it, as if it were from her hands, and eats it without any pleasure? It has not the pleasure of taste, for it has a disrelish for everything it takes ; it has not the pleasure of giving its mother content, for she is absent ; but knowing her will, it eats simply from the motive of conforming its own will to hers.

Such ought to be the purity and the generosity of our love in regard to God. It often happens in the spiritual life, that we are sick both in body and soul ; that we are tired of all the practices of piety, and that we no longer find any consolation in the holiest exercises. A thousand importunate fears attack us ; the enemy of our salvation subjects us to frequent assaults, and casts our soul into trouble ; he suggests to us numberless perplexing doubts ; it seems to us that all our efforts are useless ; that God disdains our services ; that our love for Him is only imaginary, since we do not feel within ourselves that we love ; and to crown our afflictions, we do not find any help—at least any sensible help—from the superior part of the soul ; because it is in the midst of trouble itself, and assailed by the suggestions of the tempter, who seeks to fill it with fear. It is true, the faith which abides there endeavours to sustain and console us ; but in these painful circumstances, there

is so much noise and commotion in the senses, and in the imagination, that the voice of faith cannot be heard, and the soul has all the difficulty in the world to avoid consenting to the temptation.

These are the interior pains; these are the agonies of the soul, which tend to cleanse it, and to impart a greater purity to its holy love. For then, deprived of all pleasure which might facilitate our union with the Divine Goodness, pure love unites us to God without a medium;—that is to say, it unites will to will, heart to heart; and without the help of any contentment, or of our own personal interest. This union becomes the closer, because there is the less of sweetness in it, and more of bitterness; the soul then believes itself to be without the love of God, and is deeply afflicted at it. It seeks everywhere for this Divine love, and nowhere finds it. And where should it be found? In the exterior senses, where it never existed? In the imagination, which is a prey to the numberless sad impressions which torment it? In the reason, exposed to troubles, and darkness, and the strongest apprehensions? No, not there.

It is in the most exalted part of the spirit that we must seek for this holy love: since there it dwells, as in its centre. The desolate soul seeks for it there indeed, and she finds it without knowing it; because the darkness that covers the soul, and the sadness which depresses it, do not permit her to feel the sweetness she used generally to find in

this Divine love. Hence it was, that Magdalen, on meeting her Divine Master at the Sepulchre, did not recognise Him, because she was too overwhelmed with regret at His absence. What shall the soul do then in such a desolate state? It must have recourse to the holy Will of God—to union with Jesus, abandoned by His Father. Herein is the agony of self-love, and of the human will. We must, after the example of our Saviour, make the sacrifice of both our self-love and our human will. Our dear Jesus, after having endured every torment, and no longer able to resist His sufferings on the Cross, did what the stag does when pursued by the hounds, out of breath, reduced to the last extremity—it surrenders to the huntsmen, but with tears in its eyes. It is thus that our Divine Saviour, at the point of death, uttered a great cry, shedding many tears, and exclaimed: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit.” This word—the last of His life—was also the greatest effort and the strongest proof of His love for His Divine Father.

Let us die, then; let us die to our own will, that the Will of God may reign in us; let us die to our own pleasure, to do God’s good pleasure; let us die to our own joys, and to our own satisfaction, to be the joy and the satisfaction of God. Behold the Most Holy Virgin, and the beloved disciple, at the foot of the Cross. Admire the fidelity of their love, in the midst of shouts, blasphemies, insults, and extreme desolation. The Object of their tender

love is already covered with the shadows of death ; on the discoloured face of the Saviour Jesus, and in His dying Eyes, the expression is one of extreme weakness, depression, and complete exhaustion ; the sun refuses to give light to the earth, shrouded in the frightful darkness which envelops Mount Calvary as with a funeral pall. Yet the two holy lovers stand perseveringly at the feet of Jesus. Mary and the beloved disciple continue firm and intrepid. Their love, like to a rock beaten by the tempest, remains immovable amidst the agitated waves of sorrow ; it grows stronger, and rises above the waters of tribulation, being always fixed on the immutable Will of God. Therefore, withstand all the efforts of the tempest, endure the violence of the storm, suffer always, that you may always love. Amen.

IV.

WE NEVER GIVE MORE JOY TO GOD THAN WHEN
WE LIVE WITHOUT JOY.

A HOLY Religious, a spiritual director of great experience and knowledge in the ways of perfection and of the Cross, was asked one day, by what means we could, in this world, give joy to God ? He replied, We must be without joy ; we must live and die without joy ; for it is then that God tastes

and relishes the soul, if I may so express myself, as food which is to one's liking. We are the joy of God, when He finds nothing of self-satisfaction in the soul; and consequently nothing which could hinder His own content within it. Then the soul belongs entirely to God; there is nothing in it, of what is earthly; nothing of what is human; nature, that is, self-love, is destroyed and consumed by the fire of Divine love. Then the sacrifice is complete, the holocaust is without rapine, and the soul, having nothing dearer to sacrifice to God, after sacrificing to Him all its joys, thus assumes a perfect resemblance to the Divine object of its love, the Saviour Jesus, Who never tasted joy in Himself. "Christ," saith the apostle, "did not please Himself." (Rom. xv. 3.) His Sacred Heart was always saddened with sorrow and bitterness. "My sorrow," He says, "is always before me." (Psalm xxxviii. 18.)

God made the same reply to a holy nun one day, when she asked Him, in prayer, which of all the soul's interior states was the most pleasing to Him. As her question was accompanied with humility and filial confidence, and proceeded from a lively desire to glorify God, she heard interiorly this reply: "It is the state of those who are continually deprived of satisfaction, who carry in their hearts a constant burden of sorrow and bitterness; for whom heaven is one of bronze, earth one of thorns, and who are a perpetual cross to themselves; who

do not know what it is, by experience, to enjoy life for one moment, to taste one unmingled joy, to receive Communion without fear, to meditate with recollection, to relish one spiritual reading; whose entire life is one long tissue of crosses; of crosses in the body, and crosses in the soul, and crosses habitually in both body and soul. Such are the souls most dear to My Father," said the Saviour to her, and in such we take our delight.

But must I, a sufferer may ask, must I joyfully endure this state of continual affliction? Must I, when in this state, feel those ardent desires, which would make me regard it with love and pleasure? "This is not by any means necessary," replies a holy Religious, "since the peculiar quality of this state is to be without joy. It is true that when a generous soul comes to know the value of this state of suffering, and to see how glorious it is to be thus the joy of God, in living and dying without joy, it ought, during this reflection, to return thanks to God for conducting it by this way; and to feel in this moment of light, a great promptitude of will to walk in it; but when the time of reflection has passed, God does not demand that we should feel either a desire or a strong inclination for such a state; but only that we should keep ourselves in peace and in silence; that we should perform our usual exercises of piety, and fulfil the duties of our state of life with so much the more fidelity, as we find within ourselves the greater

disinclination and repugnance to do so, in order to testify to God, that if we remain attached to His service, it is not for the joy we find in it, but for the desire we have to please Him, and to show Him all the purity and disinterestedness of our love."

"I one day had the consolation," says Father Piny, "of conversing with one whom God conducted in this way of confidence. And as I was explaining to him the state of an afflicted person, who wished nothing so much as to suffer with joy, what he suffered with so much dislike and repugnance, as to nature; 'for myself,' he replied, 'I do not see so far, and I do not ask of God to suffer with pleasure, and to bear joyfully a state without joy and without pleasure; but I am satisfied, and I think God is so likewise, if I suffer and bear this state in patience and in silence, for I think it is quite enough when we endure in peace, a state so painful and so trying.'"

Ah! how many there are who would devote their lives to the most cruel suffering, on condition that they were accompanied and followed by those Divine caresses which incomparably surpass the hardness of the trial! Oh! how delightful it is to suffer thus, when Mount Calvary and Mount Tabor are so happily intermingled! . . . Everybody wishes their crosses to be sweetened, and hardly can any be found who are willing to drink of the same chalice as Jesus.

Love, love the purity of sufferings, as much as you love purity in love. Say, "If I suffer, I wish that my suffering may be of advantage to me, and I do not wish to lose any part of it. Now, if it is not pure, I lose the best part of it. If the chalice which I choose is the more bitter for being quite pure, it will be the more sanctifying; and this cordial potion will transmit its virtues, both its life and its death, to the most inward part of the soul."

There are chalices of different kinds presented to us by the Hand of God. There are some which the high esteem of the world render glorious; such are easy to drink: there are others which are sweetened by the compassion shown by friends and relations; such are taken without much difficulty: there are others which are diluted with Divine consolations; these rather deserve the name of a "delicious beverage." There are other chalices which are ignominious, full of gall; these are the chalices I offer you, if you wish to become the joy of God, and aspire to a pure and solid love; for pure love always aspires to pure sufferings; and why? because it wishes to show the extent of its fidelity and its disinterestedness, and it desires to give proofs of it; and this it cannot do more perfectly than when it suffers without content or consolation—without interior lights, without the support of creatures, and without their approbation,—and, finally, without any interior sweetness.

Embrace your cross, then, in all its purity, if

you wish to become the joy of a God who has deigned to make it His joy to die for you. Drink courageously of the chalice of Jesus ; drink it, full of wormwood and gall as it is ; and do not seek any sweetness in it ; content yourself with being the contentment of this beloved Saviour ; love as He loved, the good pleasure of God, and this, only and entirely. After His example, always do what is pleasing to your Heavenly Father, without thinking of what would give pleasure to yourself. You should have the ambition of those great souls, who in the midst of their sufferings and their sacrifices, did not consider themselves, and experienced no other sentiment than the pleasure of becoming the joy of God, in their state of victims, immolated to His glory.

“As to sacrifices,” says St. Francis of Sales, “there is none to be compared with that of Abraham ; and we must acknowledge, to the honour of this patriarch, that no other creature ever carried his fidelity and strength of love for his Creator so far as he did ; nothing is wanting in the holocaust which he offered to God ; for His sake, and to please Him, he spared no affection of his soul, for he sacrificed the strongest and dearest one he possessed. He was first addressed in these words : ‘Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father’s house, and come into the land which I shall show thee.’ He instantly leaves all, and he sets out on his journey,

not knowing where he was to go ; the love of his country, the pleasure of being with relatives, his attachment to the paternal roof, nothing can delay him a single moment ; he sets out without deliberating, to go wherever it might please God to lead him. What abnegation ! What self-denial ! Learn then, by this example, that at the first sign of God's will, we must renounce the most lawful affection for all created objects, and that this renunciation is necessary, in order to love God perfectly.

“ But this is nothing in comparison with what follows. God calls him again twice ; and content with his promptitude in replying, He said to him : ‘ Take thy only begotten son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of Vision, and there thou shalt offer him for a holocaust upon one of the mountains which I shall show thee.’ Scarcely had he received the command, than he set forth with his dear son. After a journey of three days, he reached the foot of the mountain, where he left his young men with the baggage ; and after giving his son the wood to carry, which was necessary for the holocaust, he takes with him fire and a sword. As they ascended the mountain, Isaac said to his father, ‘ Father !’ and he answered, ‘ What wilt thou, son ?’ ‘ Behold,’ said he, ‘ the fire and the wood ; but where is the victim for the holocaust ?’ And Abraham said, ‘ God will Himself provide a victim for the holocaust, my son.’ They proceeded

together, and reached the place which God had shown to Abraham; and having built an altar, and arranged the wood upon it, he bound Isaac, and laid him on the pile of wood. Then he took the sword, and put forth his hand to immolate his son; and behold an angel of the Lord from heaven at that instant called to him, saying: 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he answered: 'Here I am.' And he said to him: 'Lay not thy hand upon the boy, neither do thou anything to him. Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thine only begotten son for my sake.' Abraham raised his eyes, and saw behind him a ram amongst the briars, sticking fast by the horns, which he took, and offered for a holocaust, instead of his son." (Gen. xxii.)

What a sacrifice was that of Abraham and Isaac! Who can say which of the two showed greater love? Was it on the side of Abraham, immolating the most amiable of sons? or on the side of Isaac, allowing himself to be bound and laid on the altar, like a lamb, and calmly waiting for the hand of his own father to strike the fatal blow? For my own part, I think that each surpasses the other, in some points, and in different ways. For constancy and longanimity, Abraham seems to me to deserve the preference; but for magnanimity, I do not hesitate to give the palm to Isaac. Although Abraham was advanced in years, and perfect in the science of holy love; although

he had just before been strengthened by a heavenly vision, and by the Divine voice, yet the effort that he made to testify the fidelity of his love, makes him truly a prodigy worthy of our admiration. But there is something that surpasses all admiration to see Isaac, in the spring-time of his life, and but yet a novice in holy love, offer himself at the mere command of his father, to be immolated on the altar, in order to obey the Divine will.

But if we are struck with admiration at the magnanimity of Isaac, we shall be no less so on considering the trial that Abraham passed through, determined as he was to slay his son, during the three days he had to think of his sacrifice in the bitterness of his heart. I see him reaching the mountain top with his son. The last thing the youth thought of was that of being offered in sacrifice; and he asks his father, "Where is the victim?" The meekness and simplicity of Isaac, his candour, his innocence, his zeal in aiding his father throughout the journey, in carrying the wood upon his shoulders, in laying it on the altar; was this not enough to melt the most hardened heart? And what a sword of grief to penetrate the heart of a father! O generous heart! worthy of the admiration of angels, and the praise of God Himself!

When will it be, O Lord, that after having sacrificed all that we have, we shall immolate ourselves, by offering You the holocaust of our free will, this

favourite of our heart, this only and well-beloved son, our will? When will it be, that after having bound it with the bonds of charity, we shall place it on the pile of Your cross, of Your lance, and of Your thorns?—that so it may be a living victim, continually immolated to Your good pleasure, by the ministry of holy love, which shall pierce it with its arrows, and consume it with its flames?

O happy fate of our will, if dying to itself amidst the flames of Divine love, it expires on the Cross of our Saviour Jesus! Ah, how truly we should be free, if we made ourselves perfectly the slaves of the will of God! Let us die thus, if we wish to live a happy life; for to live to ourselves is death.

I can readily conceive a pious and fervent person to say, that we may practise the love of God in the midst of bodily pains, or of those trials of the mind which regard only temporal things, and which do not deprive us of the gifts of grace; but how can we keep ourselves in this habitual practice of love, when we see ourselves full of daily imperfections, of a multitude of spiritual miseries, at which the infinitely pure eye of the Lord must be offended. Does not Jesus Christ command us to be perfect, as His Heavenly Father is perfect? How then can I bear my weaknesses, through love for the will of God, and practise that love? To this I reply, with St. Francis of Sales, that we ought not to love our imperfections, for they are indeed a bad tree; but we must bear our imperfec-

tions with patience, for this bad tree is capable of bearing good fruit. And what is this good fruit? The precious knowledge of ourselves, the profound sentiment of the extreme need we have of grace, and the rare virtue of humility; I mean the humility of the heart, the humility we gain from the experience of our frailties, which keeps us always dependent upon God; in the habitual conviction of our nothingness; in the continual thought of our total inability to do anything that is good, and our natural inclination for all that is evil. You are not ignorant of the fact, that these dispositions are essential for those who wish to belong perfectly to God; and it is precisely to keep us in them, that God leaves our imperfections in us. He wishes, no doubt, that we should be perfect; but not in our own way, and according to our own tastes. We should like a perfection which would flatter our self-love, by the absence of every defect; and God wishes a perfection which immolates our self-love, by the sight and the feeling of our miseries. Our sanctity does not consist in having absolutely no imperfections; but in not being attached to them, either in heart or in will. God commands us to be perfect, by fighting against our inclinations, in so far as they are criminal, culpable, or voluntary; but His intention is not to exempt us from them, as far as the trouble and difficulty they cause us is concerned, for, in this latter respect, our bad inclinations serve marvellously to purify us, and

to make us practise the love of God, since we may regard them as crosses, which His Providence has given us to carry ; and, in the view of His good pleasure, to carry them in peace.

It is a fundamental maxim of Christian perfection, that all interior trials, whatever they may be—the most humiliating temptations, repugnance in the exercise of piety, distaste for prayer, perplexities of conscience, darkness of mind, doubt of salvation—in a word, all the spiritual trials which afflict and crucify the soul—are crosses infinitely precious. God only gives them to privileged souls on which He wishes to bestow His rarest favours, and He always proportions their rigour to the degree of sanctity which He destines for them. They are, therefore, the pledges of His love, and not the effect of His anger. The trial of these afflictions is a kindly fire, which consumes all the stains of the soul, and renders it pure and holy in the eyes of God. But in order to reap from them all the fruit which God Himself proposes in sending them to us, we ought to receive them with love, support them in peace, and keep ourselves in perfect evenness of soul, founded on submission and on the Will of God. You ought, doubtless, to fight against temptation, you ought courageously to struggle with the repugnances of nature, to arm yourself against tepidity in prayer, to excite yourself to act with fervour and with faith ; but do not forget that this daily combat, that this painful and labo-

rious warfare ought always to be carried on in profound peace which nothing can disturb. Let all perish, rather than lose the peace of your soul; and in order to preserve it, habituate yourself to the different states of your conscience. Do not rely on any one interior disposition; do not attach yourself more to one than to another. Be as much pleased to see yourself covered with rags as clothed in purple. What does it matter to you whether your heart is in consolation or in dryness, in light or in darkness? It is God you have to love, and not yourself. Now, God is not more likely to be found in interior sweetness than in aridity. Spiritual consolations are not God: they are often obstacles to our union with Him, because they are a medium—something that intervenes between God and ourselves, and which stops our heart on its way to Him.

“God is found more,” says St. Augustine, “where I find myself the least. He is more with me, therefore, when I am sad than when I abound in joy.” “There are persons,” says the holy Bishop of Geneva, “who cannot maintain their courage and fervour, except when they are nourished, and, as it were, seasoned with some sensible consolation.”

They are like little children, who prefer fruit preserved in sugar, and who, after sucking the honey which is put on their bread, throw the bread on the ground. If Divine sweetness were

capable of being separated from the love of God, the interested souls of whom we speak would be content with the consolations, and would willingly leave the love. As this separation cannot be made, they seek the love for the sake of the sweetness ; and when there is no longer any sweetness, they make very little account of the love.

These persons are in great danger of turning back when these spiritual consolations fail them, or of amusing themselves with tasting the vain and passing consolations which separate and remove us far from the true love of God, and they are even in danger of mistaking for Divine consolations those fatal comforts which insinuate a subtle poison into a soul disposed to sensuality,—I mean, they are in danger of resting in sensible things. In order to prevent so fatal an error, seek God purely and forget yourself. Be persuaded that your virtue will always be feeble until you are solidly established in this purity of love, and in holy indifference as to the interior states which you may be in, whether they be sad or joyous.

“To love God,” says a pious author, “is not to feel that one loves Him ; to love Him, is not to understand His love ; to love Him, is not to be always in action of body and mind ; to love Him, is not to fly towards Him with inconceivable ardour. . . . But to love Him in all the purity of love, is simply to be content, in the spirit of humility and sacrifice, with whatever position, with

whatever circumstances Divine Providence places us in. When shall we be in this state of simplicity, in order to find perfect love therein? When shall we be like children in the Hands of this amiable Spouse of our souls? Do you not see that an infant cares not whether its swaddling-clothes be poor rags or materials of the finest quality? If we are truly simple in the Hands of God, we shall likewise be as content to allow ourselves to be wrapped in poor rags as to be clad in the most gorgeous dress: that is to say, we shall suffer with perfect indifference, and with a child-like simplicity and amiability, that God should clothe us as He wills, with darkness or with light—should fill us with consolation or with bitterness, should conduct us by a way sown with thorns or by one strewn with flowers? and whatever interior state we may be in, our only and simple intention and desire will be to be with God, to see God, and Him only; to taste and relish only God, to have no repose but in His love, as an infant reposes on its mother's breast, saying with David: 'The Lord rules me, and nothing will be wanting to me.' (Ps. xxii. 1.) Herein is the secret of becoming the joy of God in this world: it is to have no other joy but in Him."

"When our dear Saviour was yet a little infant," says St. Francis of Sales, "and the Blessed Virgin carried Him in her arms, if He had been asked where He was going, He would have replied,

‘It is not I Who go, it is My Mother who goes for Me.’ If again the question had been put to Him, ‘Is it not true, at least, that You go with Your Mother?’ ‘No,’ He would have had reason to say, ‘I do not go at all, I am carried; and if I go where I am carried, it is not by My own steps, but by those of My Mother. I do not go with her, but she carries Me; I am in her arms, and she walks for Me.’ But if, continuing the question, we had said, ‘You are most willing, at least, O Divine Infant, to let Your Mother carry You?’ He would have replied, ‘I wish nothing of the sort; she who walks for Me, wishes for Me. I equally leave to her the care of walking, and of wishing to go wherever she may like; as I only walk by her steps, I only wish by her will. To wish, or not to wish, is not the matter of My thought. When I am in the arms of My incomparable Mother, I abandon every care to her, except that of lying on her breast, of throwing My arms round her neck, and of embracing her tenderly—of giving her a thousand kisses. Would you know what I think about in the midst of these caresses and delights? I regard My Mother as a tree of life, and Myself as the fruit of that tree. I think that I am her heart, and that she has no other; or that I am in the midst of her heart, as the soul which animates it. In this situation, I do not give Myself any anxiety about My going or coming. Without walking a single step, My Mother walks for me, when she

walks for herself. I have no need to will anything, because her will is enough for Me. Thus I am always tranquil, whether she goes quickly or slowly, to one side or the other, it is no matter of importance to Me. I am always content, whatever she may do, provided that I am in her arms, that I rest in her bosom, where I find more delight than among the lilies.'

"Oh, what a beautiful and sublime disposition of soul! Behold your Model! Let us die, like the child Jesus, to our own will; let us die to our own joys, to our own human satisfaction, if we wish to become the joy and the satisfaction of God. Let us limit all our cares to the one care of blessing the Lord for all that He does; and let us say with Job, 'The Lord hath given me all, and the Lord hath taken all away. May His Name be blessed.'"

V.

THOUGHTS AND TEXTS TAKEN FROM THE HOLY
SCRIPTURE, FOR MEDITATION AND EJACULATORY
PRAYER, FOR THE USE OF THE AFFLICTED.

"GREATER love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (St. John xv. 13.) Our Saviour has laid down His life for us; and if it had been necessary for our salvation,

that He should have remained on the Cross all His life, and even for centuries, He would not have hesitated to do so. We may add, that if it were now necessary, in order to rescue us from eternal death, that He should come down from Heaven a second time, and again begin His labours and penitential life, to end it, as He did before, on the altar of Calvary, His love would find nothing painful in such a sacrifice. O Jesus! grant that I may correspond to such an excess of charity!

“He has loved me and delivered Himself for me.” (Gal. ii. 20.) He offered Himself to the Divine Justice to pay all my debt; and that, by the free choice of His own will, and only because He loved me. “He was offered because it was His own will.” (Isaias liii. 7.)

“Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps.” (1 St. Peter ii. 21.) Jesus Christ has left us an example of patience and charity. Let us, then, follow Him, since He is the way, the truth, and the life. Let us trace out in ourselves the image of His virtues. Let us bear our afflictions with love, as He did; with meekness, or, at least, with courageous resignation.

Since this Divine Saviour has vouchsafed to suffer in His Body such extreme agony, let us arm ourselves] with the same resolutions, and let us be always [ready to suffer for His love. “Christ therefore] having suffered in the flesh, be you

also armed with the same thought." (1 Peter iv. 1.)

"Let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us." Let us submit, with a willing heart, to the hard trials which Providence sends us, "looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith:" having our eyes always fixed on Jesus, our Leader, and our Model. (Heb. xii. 1.)

In our state of affliction, let us often call to mind the sufferings of the Son of God, and the patient love with which He endured them. All mankind, as sinners, rose up against Him, and subjected Him to the most cruel sufferings. Let us often have before our eyes this Divine Saviour, prostrate under the weight of so many sorrows. Let us consider His meekness, and His longanimity, in order that so much virtue may encourage us in our trials, and that we may not be wearied of suffering. "Think diligently upon Him, that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds." (Heb. xii. 3.)

"Jesus is the man of sorrows," saith the prophet Isaias. "He knows by experience what our infirmities are. He has endured them all in His own Person. Yes, the pains I have at this moment, whether of the mind or the body, He has felt Himself, with whatever is most bitter and most acute therein. He was covered with wounds and sores, drenched with gall and vinegar. 'We

have seen Him, He was the most abject of men, the outcast of the people, the contempt of the populace. They trampled Him underfoot, with more contempt and hatred than a worm of the earth. Yet, consult the Heart of Jesus, broken with so much bitterness; ask Him if He loves you. Ah! He lives and breathes only for you. He ceases not to pray to His Father for your salvation, and to merit for you, by His sorrows and sufferings, the grace to support your own.

We are not our own; we belong to Jesus Christ. Yes, we belong to Him, "for He hath redeemed us," saith St. Peter, "not with corruptible things, like gold or silver, or any such earthly material, but with His own most precious Blood." (1 Peter i. 18.) If I already belong entirely to God, for having created me, what do I not owe Him for having redeemed me, at the price of so many and such great sufferings?

¶ "Perhaps some one might have the courage to die for his friend, and for his benefactor," saith St. Paul, "but to die for his enemies, to put himself in the place of the guilty, and to bear the penalty due to their crimes himself, is a charity of which Jesus Christ was the first to give us an example."

Jesus Christ has loved us, even to the degree of taking upon Himself the punishment due to all our crimes, in order to draw down upon Himself all the severity of the Divine Justice, and

to render us innocent in the eyes of His Father. "He made Himself a curse for us," that we might be the children of benediction.

"A slave might consent to lay down his life to save that of his master ; but for a master to die for his slave ! a king for his subject ! O Lord Jesus, You have loved us to such an excess, as to appear even to hate Yourself !" (St. Bonaventure.)

"If man were the God of Jesus Christ, and if Jesus Christ, with regard to man, were only a slave purchased at the lowest price, would He have been able to do and suffer more than He has done and suffered for His creatures ?" (St. Thomas.) Could He have reduced Himself to a more humiliating poverty ? Could He have delivered His Body to more inhuman executioners, or to a more cruel flagellation ? Could He have abandoned His soul to more overwhelming trials, to sorrows more intense ? Could He have practised the virtues of meekness and patience in greater perfection, in the midst of more outrageous calumnies and insults ?

"O good Jesus ! what have You seen in us, that could inebriate You with so violent a love ?" (St. Bonaventure.) How have we merited such an excess of charity ? What had You to gain by us ?

O patient love ! which during the cruel punishment of thirty-three years, never allowed the slightest complaint to escape from Your lips ; and never regarded Yourself for one moment with tenderness and compassion !

Generous love ! You would never be content or satisfied, as long as there remained anything that You could do, anything that You could suffer for us.

O insatiable love ! Your Sacred Heart would have wished to suffer, and did in fact suffer for each one of us in particular, all the torments which It offered to Your Father, for the salvation of all men.

"O Jesus ! O my love !" exclaimed St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, "how little are You known ! Ah ! if there is any one who does not love You, does he not deserve to be anathema ? I love You, O my love ! may You alone reign in my heart ! O sweet, O cruel love ! You make me die while I live ; and live while I die ! Life is to me a painful death ; and death would be a delicious life !"

O my soul, let us go and assist at the last moments of the Saviour ; let us go and learn, by His example, to die a holy death, by submitting to the will of God. Consider this innocent victim on the Cross. The moment is come when He is about to commend His soul into the Hands of His Father. His Head already droops ; His Eyes, the consolation of the afflicted, are beginning to close ; His Lips, whence issued the words of eternal life, are becoming cold and livid. But to make the world understand that He dies by the free choice of His own will ; that He gives His life voluntarily ; and that it is not taken from Him by violence against

that will, to teach us how to die well, after having taught us how to live well, at the time when other men lose their speech, Jesus, fortified by His own strength, by strength from His Divinity, raises His Head, opens His Eyes, and, fixing them on Heaven, utters that cry of love and confidence, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend my spirit." Then He dropped His Head in token of His perfect submission, and breathed His last sigh. Thus died the Author of life, the Redeemer of mankind, the Son of the Living God, the Prince of Peace, the Father of the world to come,—our Consolation, our Friend, our Shepherd, our Model, and our only Hope! . . .

COLLOQUY WITH GOD ON THE LAST WORDS OF
JESUS CHRIST.

O ETERNAL Father, Father of Mercies, and God of all consolation, regard the voice of my Saviour, listen to the last words of Your Son. He has spoken them for me; He has spoken them while dying, that I might never lose the remembrance of them, that they might remain engraven on my heart, that I might pronounce them when I should be at my own last hour; and that You might receive my spirit as You received His.

How conformable are these words to those He pronounced in His infancy: "Do you not know

that I must be about My Father's business?" O Heavenly-Father! Your well-beloved Son has been obedient even unto death; He has always had Your will before His eyes; and He abandons Himself to it in death. This obedience is the source of my happiness; His words are my riches, my light, my consolation, and my remedy; because on seeing my Saviour thus commend His Spirit into Your Hands, I understand that those Hands are full of graces, and of mercies; that I ought to have recourse to them in my afflictions, and in my sufferings: and that at all times I shall find in them all that I have need of. This Divine Master has told us: "Where I am, there also shall My servant be." Is it not for this reason that He casts Himself into Your Hands, O Eternal Father! in order that, after His example, we may also cast ourselves into the same Hands; that we may seek Him there, and find Him there? If Your mighty Hands do not keep me, O my God, if they let me wander among creatures, what will become of me? I shall be miserable, abandoned, an outcast, and always in danger of being lost.

In the state of affliction to which I am reduced, if those Divine Hands do not sustain my courage, I shall sink under the weight of my trials; impatience will get the mastery over my heart; trouble and distress will fill my soul with weakness and bitterness. But if those merciful Hands protect me, and afford me their support, I shall fear

nothing, and nothing will be wanting to me. Hear, then, O Heavenly Father, the words of Your Divine Son. Receive me, through Him, and with Him, into Your Divine Hands. I know how unworthy I am of such a grace ; but I know also that He has obtained for me, by His obedience, and by His death, what I cannot merit of myself.

Thus, after Jesus, O my Father, and my God, I venture to commend into Your Hands, my spirit, my soul, my body, my senses, my faculties : I likewise commend into Your Hands my sins, that You may pardon them ; my wounds, that You may heal them ; my blindness, that You may enlighten it ; my tepidity, that You may incite it to fervour ; and all my weaknesses, that You may change them into strength. I cast myself into Your Hands entirely, with all that I am, and all that I have. I commend into those Hands all my trials, all my sufferings, all my anxieties, all my hopes, and all my fears. Receive me into Your Hands, O Eternal Father, through those of Your Divine Son. May those Almighty Hands lead me in the way of Your Commandments, and according to Your adorable Will ; may I acknowledge those Hands in all that happens to me ; may I see them in all the contradictions I meet with : in my losses, in my sufferings ; may I kiss them, may I adore them, even when they scourge me, since they are always the Hands of a Father, and of such a Father ! Ah ! strike me, O Lord, to call me back to You ; that I

may find my refuge in You at all times, and that I may fix my dwelling and my repose in You alone !

O Divine Hands, that created heaven and earth for me, and that created me for Yourself alone ! do not permit me to withdraw myself from Your guidance. It is in Your Hands that I shall find the Spirit of my Saviour ; and therefore, all my repose, my happiness, and my true life. But since it is by those Hands that I exist, O my God, and since they have given me being, grant that I may expect from them all those temporal blessings of which I stand in need ; and may those Divine Hands crown me in Heaven !

O beautiful Cross ! Cross ennobled by the Blood, the death of my Saviour ! more brilliant than all the stars of the firmament, and more precious than all the riches of the earth ! You are the term of His labours, the end of His exile, the commencement of His glory, His field of battle, the trophy of His victory, and the car of His triumph ! But you are also my property, the inheritance the Lord has left me ! He died in your arms, poor, naked, stripped of everything, and content with possessing you alone. Receive me, also ; fasten me to you ; be ever the place of my repose, that so I may die where Jesus lived, and ended His days for my salvation.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

O MOST holy Mother of God ! Queen of Angels, refuge of sinners, help of the afflicted, consolation of those who suffer, and health of the sick. O Mary ! with what sorrow did you witness the death of your beloved Son, this only Son of your heart, this amiable Jesus—so sweet, so patient, so obedient, so loving ; into what an abyss of sorrow were you plunged, O tender Mother ! when His body, cold and covered with blood, was placed in your arms ! Ah ! now that you are in heaven, where you see Him, all radiant with glory, obtain for me, by the anguish you suffered for the love of me, the grace to imitate His virtues to support the trials of this life with a holy resignation ; never to allow myself to be overcome by sadness or suffering, and never to think myself nearer to God, and more sustained by His invisible Hand, than when I seem to be abandoned by Him.

PRAYER, HOMAGE, AND THANKSGIVING TO ST.
JOSEPH.

SAINT JOSEPH ! glorious spouse of the Mother of God ! powerful protector of the agonizing, and special patron of a good death ! It was by you that I commenced this work ; it is by you, also, that I wish to finish it. I offer it to you anew, to

beseech you to impress upon it the seal of your love ; give it your blessing, that it may become, if I may venture to call it so, a tree of life in the field of the Church ; and that it may there yield the fruits of grace and salvation. May those who suffer, come to take refuge beneath its sheltering branches. May they there find support in their trials, a place of repose and refreshment in their fatigues. O my beloved Patron, graciously hear my prayer ! As you know, I have not been able to labour in the ministry of preaching as I desire, nor to carry the light of the Gospel to those who sit in the shadow of death ; vouchsafe to supply, by this little work, for all that I might have been able to do for the salvation of souls. After I am gone, grant that it may become like an indefatigable apostle, full of zeal ; may this little book spread through every province, city, and village ; may it visit all the hospitals ; may it speak to the heart of all the unhappy ; may it console all the afflicted ; may it revive the courage and the hope of the downcast ; and may it be for all those who are tried by misfortune, a source of joy, of patience, of peace, and consolation. All the glory of it will redound to you, O great Saint ; for I acknowledge more than ever, and I attest it to your honour, that it is to you, after God, that I owe this little work. It is you who have sustained my languishing strength to labour on with it, and at length bring it to a termination. Take it, then, under your protection ;

pour forth daily a more abundant blessing upon it ; that so it may sanctify all who are in sorrow, and lead them to eternal life. Amen.

ADVICE TO THOSE WHO VISIT THE SICK.

WE cannot too earnestly recommend the visitation of the sick in general ;—but particularly the sick poor, who are pining away in the hospitals ; or, if they remain in their homes in town or country, are confined to obscure corners, to small unhealthy rooms, stretched on miserable beds, very often on hard, infected straw, without covering, and almost without clothing ; without fire in the winter, and abandoned at once to the rigour of the seasons, of poverty, and of sickness. These unhappy sufferers should be the objects of our constant charity and watchfulness ; they are our brethren in Jesus Christ ; they are the suffering members of the Saviour of mankind. To assist them in their miseries, to console them in their distress ; to interest ourselves, not only in their temporal, but still more in their spiritual wants, is to perform acts of mercy and zeal, infinitely precious in the eyes of faith. Without speaking of the numerous indulgences which the Church has vouchsafed to attach to such practices, what commendation does not the Son of God bestow on them in the holy Gospel ! What magnificent rewards has He not promised to those who, filled with compassion, devote them-

selves to this charity ! At the last judgment, He will forget, in a manner, the heroic acts of the Apostles, the austerities of the penitents, the prayers of contemplatives, and only remember the acts of charity we may have practised towards the poor and the sick. "Come," He will say to us, "come, ye blessed of My Father ; possess ye the kingdom of heaven, which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat ; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink. I was naked, and you covered Me ; sick, and you visited Me. I was in prison, and you came unto Me." Then the just shall answer Him, saying : "Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, and fed Thee ; or thirsty, and gave Thee drink ; and when did we see Thee a stranger, and took Thee in ; and naked, and covered Thee ; and when did we see Thee sick and in prison, and came to Thee ?" And the King, answering, shall say to them : "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, My least brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt. xxv. 34.)

Yet to gather all the fruits we may expect from these works of mercy, so meritorious and so glorious in themselves, there are many virtues that we have to practise. Charity, which holds the first rank among all the virtues, is not enough if it is not accompanied by prudence and discretion—especially with regard to certain sick persons, more susceptible than others to painful impressions, whether

they arise from the nature of their malady, or their temperament, or their position. We have, therefore, thought it a duty to give some advice, of which experience has taught us the importance and necessity. We are persuaded that those who visit the sick, whether from duty or charity, will not read it without interest and profit.

1. On approaching the sick, beware of showing either too much joy or too much sadness. Too much joy would indicate insensibility or indifference, or great dissipation of mind, which would displease the sick. Too much sorrow would lead them to believe that you think their case desperate, or very alarming, and this would not fail to cause them some uneasiness. For the sick, however serious their illness may be, or however near they may be to their end, always like you to have some hope as to their state—or, at least, they are not pleased if you seem to despair of their recovery. This is the reason why, if you wish that your visit should be agreeable to them, you should take care not to appear with a sad and anxious countenance, and especially not to tell them—as some imprudent or ill-disposed persons do—that they do not look so well as usual, that they look pale, &c. These are but poor compliments, at which a sick person can scarcely avoid being annoyed. On approaching the sick, your manner should be calm, modest, and simple. Conform, as much as duty and charity permit, to the different sentiments which they

manifest. If they are sad, be sad yourself with them, and yet at the same time always endeavouring to alleviate their suffering by some words of consolation. If they are disposed to be cheerful, be cheerful also; relate them some interesting story which will make their heart expand.
Read to them.

2. Do not be of the number of those impertinent or indiscreet persons who, without any regard to the suffering state of the sick, fatigue them with a variety of idle and insignificant questions, or by a quantity of words which only disturb their tranquillity and excite their imagination, and fill it with many useless or even dangerous thoughts. If the sick appear fatigued, be sparing and discreet in your words. Take an interest in everything they stand in need of, as to medicine, food, &c. Ask them if they would like to hear a little reading; and in case they agree to it, choose by preference some pious and edifying anecdote or story, which may encourage and strengthen them, and lead their thoughts to God. When the sick are less fatigued, and take pleasure in listening to you, do not try their patience too much, but always proportion your conversation to the amount of interest they take in what you say.

3. Lastly, there is a class of persons whose conduct towards the sick you must particularly avoid, because it is highly reprehensible. I mean those indiscreet visitors of the sick whom you will hear,

in the corner of a room where some one is dying, talking about the danger he is in, but with such little reserve and moderation that all they say is heard by the patient. "He will not get through the night," "The chill of death is upon him," "The doctor does not give him five hours to live," &c. It is needless to say that such expressions are very improper, and quite out of place in the mouth of a Christian.

THE END.

